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QUEEN HELEN, The Amazon of the Overland;

Or, The Ghouls of the Gold Mines.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "WILD BILL, THE PISTOL DEAD SHOT,"
"WILD BILL'S GOLD TRAIL," ETC., ETC.



FROM THE LIPS OF THE THROWER CAME THE RINGING WORDS: "HOLD, QUEEN HELEN, OF THE OVERLAND. YOU ARE WANTED!"

Queen Helen,

The Amazon of the Overland : OR, The Ghouls of the Gold Mines.

A Romance of Crime, Mystery, Adventure and Retribution in the Far West.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "RED LIGHTNING," "THE KID GLOVE MINER," "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCENE AND THE ACTORS OF THE STORY.

KIND readers, in a few words let me present to you the scene of my romance of the western mines, and the characters who take part therein.

Golden Gulch was, some years ago, an important mining center.

It was a "shanty town," situated in a romantic valley of a wildly grand mountainous region, and, at the time of which I write was as full of pure, unadulterated "cussedness," as any place of its size upon the earth.

A large and flourishing hotel, known as the "Gold Brick," was the hub of the town by day, and the Temple of Fortune, a gambling hell, the axis upon which the citizens of Golden Gulch revolved by night.

Half a score of stores that did a thriving trade, a score of drinking saloons, a town hall, church, court-house, school-house and Vigilante Committee room all in one, with a wagon repair shop, blacksmith shop, stage stable and a hundred or two shanty residences comprised Golden Gulch proper, while encircling it for miles were the miners' camps in the valleys and hills, and in the mountains was a band of robbers known as the Ghouls of the Gold Mines, and under the command, it was said, of a woman who had no mercy and was fiendish in her hates.

Of the citizens in general of Golden Gulch, it may be said with truth that they were a hard crowd, though there were some noble exceptions to the rule, as my story will develop.

To present the *dramatis personae* of my romance, I will begin with Major Simon Suggs, the fat little proprietor of the Gold Brick.

He had a smile for every man who had money, and a frown for every one who had not, and Major Simon Suggs was his idol, and he gave him full worship.

Among his guests were Colonel De Camp Roland, an ex-army officer, and manager and partner in a mine known as the Elgin, which had had a strange history.

His son-in-law was his partner, with one other, the three controlling the really splendid property.

This son-in-law had come to Golden Gulch to see his sister and her husband, the owners of the Elgin mine, and who were known as Elegant Ed and his Angel.

He found them dead, murdered the day of his arrival, was accused of their murder, branded with the words "murderer" and "thief" in his hands and set free.

In disguise he returned and under the title of the Kid Glove Miner reaped a rich revenge upon those who had thus wronged him.

And this man, the Kid Glove Miner, Horace Hammond by name, had won and wedded Ruby Roland, the colonel's daughter, and their home was at the Gold Brick.

Then there was Fred Fairbanks, his partner, and a reformed gambler, who, as Faro Fred the proprietor of the Temple of Fortune had made his mark at Golden Gulch; but, meeting with a fair young girl, who in man's attire had drifted out to that wild region to seek revenge upon one who had cruelly wronged her, and slain her father, the handsome sport had made her his wife, and they too dwelt at the Gold Brick.

Next I may present two worthy characters, hunters and guides as their services were needed, and diamonds in the rough answering to the names of Tempest Tom and Lanky.

Monk Harris, a whole-souled stage-driver, Sneaky Jim, Gospil Sam and Hosannah Kate, a trio of exceedingly "hard citizens," with Dick Dunwoody the "Magic Miner," Duke Moreland the "Demon Doctor," Queen Helen and her Ghouls, and a few others that may drift into my story, complete the list, and go to make up a mass of actors in a life drama only to be found dwelling among the mountains and plains of our borderland.

CHAPTER II.

THE GAMBLER'S OATH.

A man was pacing to and fro in a handsomely furnished room, and in an Eastern city.

His appearance was striking, and his air that of one born and reared in refinement, while his surroundings indicated luxury without stint.

His form was elegant yet powerful, and he was clothed in the height of fashion, with a slight bearing toward dandyism.

But his face was a strong one, fearless, reso-

lute, with features cut in a handsome mold, and eyes of a strange brilliancy seldom seen in dark-blue orbs such as his, for he was a thorough blonde, with a complexion a woman might envy, golden hair and a bronze-hued mustache that added strength to his face and half concealed a look upon the mouth that was treacherous and wicked.

Now, as he paced to and fro, his hands behind his back, his brow was thoughtful, and his expression was stern.

Suddenly the door opened and a woman swept into the room and threw herself into an easy-chair, while she said with almost savage earnestness:

"Well, you have lost and so have I."

She was a woman, young and beautiful, clad in costly attire, and in a walking-suit, for her bonnet, wrap and gloves were on, as though she had just entered the house.

Her face was strangely like that of the man, who had halted in his walk and stood before her, pale and angry looking.

Beautiful she certainly was, but it was a beauty to fear, did one study closely her nature.

"What mean you, Helen?" asked the man, gazing intently upon her.

"I mean, Will, that all is lost, for they are married!" said the maiden, making her words distinct and cutting.

The man fairly staggered under the blow: but he rallied quickly and asked:

"How know you this, Helen?"

"I will tell you how I know this, brother mine," and she took from her pocket a telegram and said:

"This is from Boland the Detective, and he says:

"Edgar Elgin and Miss Lois Hammond eloped last night, and were married in this city to-day.

"They start West to-night. Shall I follow them?"

"Can there be no mistake about this?" asked the man, chewing the ends of his handsome mustache.

"None; for Boland is no man to be fooled."

"They eloped, he says?"

"Yes, for you know that Ed Elgin is poor, and has been a little wild, so was forbidden the house by Judge Hammond, as you were, brother mine."

"As I was?"

"What do you mean, Helen?" and the man's face flushed.

"Ah! Will, you kept that secret from me, but I found it out—through Boland the Detective," and she laughed lightly.

"And what did he say?" asked the man, evidently annoyed greatly.

"He said that Judge Hammond, believing you rich and honorable, gave his consent to have you marry his lovely daughter."

"But that Ed Elgin called on him, told him that you were keeping up this handsome home on your winnings as a professional gambler, and had not a dollar over what you won."

"He gave the judge proofs, for he took him to your gambling-hell to show him that he told the truth, and then you were dismissed."

"But the judge did not reward Ed Elgin by giving him his daughter, so the two eloped."

"So now what are you going to do about it, brother Will?" and the woman smiled radiantly.

"Well, Helen, I know not what to do."

"I love Lois Hammond, as you know, and I hate Ed Elgin, as you also know; but they are beyond my reach now."

"Oh, no!"

"What do you mean?"

"They are not beyond my reach," she said in a low, earnest tone.

"I do not understand you."

"Don't you?"

"Well, I suppose I must explain."

"We should have been rich, Will, and then all would have gone well."

"But, as our father speculated away our inheritance, he left us only as an inheritance the memory that he had ruined us and blew out his brains as an atonement."

"You had to support yourself, and I was left to your charge, and nobly have you cared for me, brother."

"But you were too lazy to work, so took to gambling, and to-day you are rich, to-morrow you are a pauper, and thus it is."

"Had you married the heiress, Lois Hammond, all would have gone well."

"But she flirted with you and then escaped you."

"And look at myself."

"I loved and still love Edgar Elgin."

"He loved me or pretended to, until he met Lois Hammond, and then I was cast aside."

"Had he made me his wife, I believe I would have lived happily all my days."

"But he cast me off for her, and Lois cast you aside for him, and there is but one thing left for us now."

She had spoken low, and in a tone that was reckless, and which showed how deeply she felt all she uttered.

"And what can we do now, Helen?" he asked.

"We can avenge ourselves."

"Ha! you strike the right chord now, and I will put a man on their track and make their joy short-lived."

He spoke the words in a loud, ringing tone, and his face became deadly pale with passion, showing how deeply she had moved him.

"Now you show the spirit that fills my heart, brother mine."

"But you must put no one to shadow them; none other than yourself must strike the blow."

"I can hire an assassin to kill him."

"No, hired assassins are not true, and they have a disagreeable way of remembering what they have done to the cost of their employers."

"What would you have me do?"

"Do the work yourself."

"I have not the time to leave now, and would sacrifice too much."

"Brother Will, you will have to sacrifice all, and at once."

"Helen, why in Heaven's name are you so mysterious to-day?"

"Will, the other night a gentleman in your gambling-saloon gave you a check for one hundred dollars, did he not?"

"You know that as well as I do," he said peevishly.

"You raised the check to one thousand, and Edgar Elgin cashed it for you at the bank."

"It was discovered soon and Elgin told that you had changed the money on it, and you are to be arrested to-night in your gambling-hell."

"Great God! is this true?"

"Yes."

"How do you know this?"

"Through a detective I have had at work."

"Then I must fly."

"By all means, and I will go with you."

"But where shall we go?"

"I have thought of that, so telegraphed Boland to shadow Ed Elgin and his wife and report to me in Omaha."

"He has therefore gone on the same train with them, for he does not know our motives in wishing to follow them, as he would not serve if he did, for he is too honorable to aid crime."

"Well, we will get together every dollar we can before night, then, disguised as emigrants, we will start west on the midnight train out of the city, and will meet Boland in Omaha."

"He does not know me except under my assumed name, and when we find out from him where Elgin and his wife have located, we can shadow them until time to seek our revenge."

"Helen, my noble sister, you are a queen among women, and I will go with you where you say."

"Edgar Elgin has ruined me, and his wife cast me adrift, and I swear I will have revenge on both."

"You have saved me from going to prison, and I will devote my life to you."

"Yes, I swear to hunt down Edgar Elgin and his wife, if they go to the uttermost parts of the earth, and visit upon them a revenge that will blast their lives and sweeten my whole future existence."

"You swear this, William Weldon?" and the young woman sprung to her feet and faced him.

"I do, before High Heaven!" he said impressively.

"So be it, for I swear too to be avenged, for as I once loved Edgar Elgin and Lois Hammond, so do I hate them now," and the beautiful eyes of the woman fairly blazed with fury as she uttered the words.

CHAPTER III.

THE OATH KEPT.

UPON the side of a lofty range of mountains, amid scenes of grandeur and beauty, stood an humble cabin home, from the door of which could be caught a glimpse of Golden Gulch, lying far away in the valley below.

It was a cosey home, built of stout logs, containing two rooms, and nestling away against the mountain, as though seeking shelter from the keen blasts from the north.

Standing upon a natural terrace that ran back from a gap in the mountains, the humble abode was pleasantly situated, and bore about it an air of positive comfort seldom found in that wild land of the West.

That it was the cabin of a miner was evident, and one passing on the trail that led near, and seeing no other abode in sight, no mining-camp near, could not but think that it was a bold man who had pitched his tent alone in that wild region.

A thin column of smoke curls lazily up from the chimney, and a form is busy flitting to and fro within, evidently preparing the noonday meal.

Presently that form comes to the door, and a startling surprise it was to see a face so beautiful, so full of refinement, in that lonely abode.

It was the face of a woman of scarcely more than twenty, a face to love and to respect for its loveliness and innocent beauty.

The form, too, though clad in a dress befitting the home, was full of grace and elegance, while the hands and feet were small and shapely.

Turning her face down the terrace, she called

out in a clear, musical voice that pierced every recess of the mountain near:

"Edgar!"

No answer came to her call, and she repeated it again and again.

Still no answer was heard, and throwing on her head a sun-hat, and seizing a tiny rifle, she started on a well-worn trail along the terrace at a quick pace, her face anxious, for she wondered why she had received no response to her hail.

A walk of an eighth of a mile brought her to a cliff, in which was visible the entrance of a cave, from which was just emerging a man in miner's garb.

A closer look showed that he was far better attired than miners are wont to be, for his suit was of the finest material, his boots of the best make, and he wore a heavy gold chain and a watch, which he held in his hand as he stepped out of the cavern.

That he was a handsome man, begrimed with dust and in miner's garb though he was, no one would have denied, while he had, withal, a face that men and women alike would love.

His form was superb, his face ruddy with health, and his hands, though small, were bronzed and stained with exposure and toil.

"Ah, Lois, you have come for me, have you?" he called out cheerily, as the young woman approached him.

"Yes, Mister Elegant Ed, I have, and you gave me a fright, for I called you and called you, and you gave me no answer," she said, in a half-pouting way.

"Well, Ed's Angel, as the miners call you, I suppose the gold fever made me deaf, for I did not hear you, and I will show you why.

"See! I struck this little pocketful of yellow metal," and he held out toward her a buckskin bag half full of little pieces of gold.

"Oh, Ed! it is the largest find you have made any day yet," she cried joyously.

"Yes indeed, and the mine is going to pan out splendidly I feel, Lois."

"I hope so for your sake, Ed."

"And for your own, my dear wife, and won't I be a happy man when I can go to your father and say:

"Here, judge, I have brought back the daughter I ran off with, and her fortune is more than the one which you supposed I wanted when I stole her from you.

"But come, Lois, for your rosy face shows that you have been cooking dinner, and I am as hungry as a grizzly."

He drew her toward him as he spoke, and they walked along the trail leading to the cabin.

While Elegant Ed, as the miners of Golden Gulch called the young and handsome man, was making his toilet at the spring for dinner, Elegant Ed's Angel, as Lois was called, placed the edibles upon the little table, which a clean, snowy cloth covered, and added a tempting air to, while the meal was all that a hunger-sharpened appetite could desire.

Chatting pleasantly about their future prospects and hopes, the dinner hour passed, and Elegant Ed lighted his pipe and threw himself upon a rustic seat in front of the cabin to enjoy his smoke, while his wife busied herself within doors.

"Come, Ed, put your gold in the hiding-place with the other," called out Lois after a while, and rising, he entered the cabin.

As he did so a man stole quickly forward, from his place of concealment in a clump of cedars and gliding up to the door stood at one side in a listening attitude, while his right hand grasped a revolver.

A moment he stood thus, and then, after peering into the open door, stepped boldly into the cabin.

As the form of the intruder darkened the doorway Elegant Ed turned quickly to behold before him a man of striking appearance, attired in buckskin, cavalry boots being drawn over his leggings, and with a broad-brimmed sombrero upon his head.

His hair hung in golden curls upon his shoulders, his beard, a rich blonde, fell to his waist, and his eyes of dark blue were fixed upon the young miner with an evil glitter in their depths.

When he sat down to his dinner Ed Elgin had laid aside his belt of arms, and now he stood unarmed before the bold intruder who covered him with his revolver, while Lois, in alarm sprung to the side of her husband.

Though taken at a disadvantage, Elegant Ed said coolly:

"Well, sir, what do you want here?"

"Revenge."

"Revenge?" asked Elegant Ed in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, Edgar Elgin."

"Ha! you know me?"

"Did I not, why should I come here for revenge?" was the bold answer.

"What have I ever done to wrong you?"

"Much."

"Be good enough to particularize, for, though your face and voice seem familiar, I am wholly at a loss to know where we have met before."

The stranger laughed mockingly, and said:

"You may have forgotten me, Edgar Elgin,

but I have neither forgotten you or Lois Hammond, and I tell you I have come here to avenge the wrongs of myself and one other at the hands of you and that beautiful, but treacherous woman."

"Hold! breathe one word more against my wife, and, unarmed though I am, I will spring upon you," said Elegant Ed in stern, ringing tones.

"It would be the last act of your life, Elegant Ed Elgin, for I have you covered."

"Up with your hands, sir!"

"Never!"

"Obey me, for I do not wish to kill you now, and I tell you frankly I have come here for revenge."

"Up with your hands, I say!"

"In Satan's name who are you?" cried Edgar Elgin.

"Up with your hands and I will tell you who I am, for you may have a pistol on that I cannot see."

Instantly Elegant Ed raised his hands above his head, Lois tremblingly clinging to his side.

Then, with a mocking laugh, the stranger said:

"I am William Weldon."

At the name a cry broke from the lips of Lois, while Edgar Elgin, with the spring of a panther was upon his foe.

But the revolver flashed almost in his face, and without a groan even, the splendid man fell his length upon the floor.

A wild shriek broke from Lois at this, and, seeing that her husband was dead, she rushed upon his murderer, a knife in her upraised hand.

He seized her, there was a short struggle, and he felt the woman sinking from his grasp.

"Great God! I have killed her, and I meant not to do that."

"No! no! no! I sought revenge upon him and upon her, but not like that."

"No! no! no!"

He gazed down upon the fallen forms at his feet, and then, with a cry of remorse, rushed from the cabin, and dashed down the steep side of the terrace to the trail some distance below.

As he was about to turn into it, he started back and crouched out of sight, for he beheld a horseman coming at a gallop up the trail.

The next instant the man passed, going straight toward the Elgin cabin and urging his horse on at a rapid pace.

"God in Heaven! it is that Texan brother of Lois Hammond."

"If he but knew who had done the deed he will look on in yonder cabin, he would track me to the ends of the earth."

So saying, the murderer bounded away with the speed of a deer, and after a short run turned into a canyon where a woman sat upon a horse, holding another animal by the bridle-rein.

She started at the pallid face of the man, and cried:

"For God's sake, Will, tell me what has happened?"

"More than I can ever forget if I live a hundred years, Helen."

"I have killed them both."

"Killed them both?" she hoarsely said.

"Yes, but I meant not to do it. Hammond has just gone on to the cabin."

"Horace Hammond?"

"Yes, he rode by within ten feet of me."

"Come, we must ride for our lives for you know he will be a bloodhound upon our trail."

"Yes, but we must cover up our trail so that no one can follow it," said the woman in a grim tone, as the two rode on up the canyon together, both of them as white as though life had left them.

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN'S VOW.

SINCE the tragic scene that took place in the Elgin cabin, several months have passed away, months of stirring scenes in and about Golden Gulch.

First, a miner who had struck it rich had been on his way home, and had been shot and killed by some unknown person, and the band of reprobates who had found him dying by the roadside, had then gone on to the cabin to find Elegant Ed and his Angel dead.

And they found there the man of superb physique, handsome, tall and heavily bearded, whom they at once accused of being the murderer.

He told them that he had found the bodies lying as they saw them, and that the woman was his sister, the man her husband, and that he had come there to visit them.

But their ears were deaf to his words, and as they had just left the dead body of the home-returning miner lying on the trail below, they accused him also of having killed him and taken his gold.

"That man was kindly acting as my guide to this cabin, I having met him in Golden Gulch."

"He stopped to shoot a deer and I rode on ahead."

"I heard a shot, and soon he came in mortally wounded."

"He told me that a man with a long beard, strangely like myself in appearance, had fired upon him, and then had fled."

"He gave to me his fortune in trust for others, and I vowed to safely deliver it to them; but, hoping to save him rode on here for aid, and found my sister and her husband dead."

Such was his story, but it was met with derisive laughter, and he was seized, bound, robbed of his own money, and that which the miner had intrusted to him, and then he was taken to a lonely spot, and he was branded in the palm of the hands with the words Thief and Murderer.

The miner was secretly buried, his treasure and Horace Hammond's gold was appropriated by the band of seven desperadoes, and then in Golden Gulch was told only a part of the tragic story—that of the finding of the bodies of Elegant Ed and his Angel—but no word was said of the death of Lucky Pete the miner, nor the discovery of the stranger, his punishment, release, and the appropriation of the money by the Seven Stars, as the band of desperadoes was called.

Papers found among the effects of the Elgins left their riches and their mine to one William Blackstone, and being written to upon the subject, a person purporting to be said heir put in an appearance at Golden Gulch, received his fortune, gambled away the Elgin mine to a man calling himself Horace Hale, and who was a stranger to all in and about the mines.

He was a man of iron strength, had a handsome, sad face, and from the fact that he never was seen without gloves became known as the Kid Glove Miner.

Winning the mine from William Blackstone, he had gone to the lonely cabin to live, and though strange, weird sights were seen there at night, and the spot was said to be haunted by the ghosts of Elegant Ed and his wife, the Kid Glove Miner yet remained at his post.

As time went on William Blackstone gambled away his entire inheritance, became a pauper, then an outcast, and leagued himself with a band of road-agents known as "The Tax-gatherers of the Overland," and who were under the leadership of a man known as Blonde Bill, who, in all his raids by night and day, was said to be accompanied by a beautiful woman, who rode and fought like an Amazon.

Leaguing himself with this band, William Blackstone became known as Black Bill, and far and wide the Tax-gatherers were feared, for a daring and desperate crew they were.

But at last the Vigilantes arose in their might, determined to hunt down the desperado band. The Kid Glove Miner took the trail to hunt out their secret retreat, and rescue from their power Ruby Roland, who had been kidnapped from Golden Gulch, and taken to their mountain den.

Aided by one other, he had day by day followed on the scout like a bloodhound, and the curtain rises early one morning in a hidden valley of the mountains, and upon a tragic scene.

The band have been run to cover, and the last actors in its desperate deeds are grouped together for the final act, a scene of death.

Standing together, a group of three, are two men and a woman.

They are gazing upon a scene of mortal agony, a scene that can never fade from their memory.

Just in the background are their horses, one with a lady's saddle upon his back, and so solemn is the scene that even these dumb brutes have ceased cropping the velvet grass beneath their feet and stand gazing upon another group not far away.

Of these three the woman stands erect, her face as livid as though death's seal had stamped it, her eyes burning with a lurid, baleful glare, and her sharp teeth driven into her under lip until they cut deep, causing the blood to flow.

She was a woman of twenty-two, perhaps, exquisitely beautiful in face and form, and she was clad in a close-fitting riding-habit, and about her slender waist was a belt of arms.

Upon one side of her stood a tall, black-bearded man, with restless dark eyes, and clad in a suit of deep black, evidently a uniform of some kind.

He, too, was gazing upon the ghastly scene in his front, and he was very pale and evidently deeply moved.

Upon the other side of the woman stood the third person of the trio, a man attired in rough prairie garb, and with a face that was grisly and wicked.

The woman was Helen Weldon, the gambler and outlaw's sister.

The tall, heavily-bearded man was he who had called himself William Blackstone, and, becoming a road-agent, had won the sobriquet of Black Bill.

The one in the garb of the hunter, or moun-taineer, was a guide, and answered to the name of Pathfinder.

The latter it was who had kidnapped Ruby Roland, sold her to Blonde Bill for ransom money, and, tracked to his lair by the Kid Glove Miner, had been forced to lead him to the secret retreat of the outlaws.

Apart from this group, standing with her back to the weird sight upon which the others gazed, was Ruby Roland, the rescued girl.

Her hands covered her face as though to shut out the awful sight, and she leaned against a tree, her hair falling in waves down her back far below her waist.

The scene upon which the three gazed was one from which to turn with horror.

To the limb of a storm-blasted pine tree hung a human form.

Nature had done much to make the one thus hanging a superb type of manhood, physically, though after years of wrong-doing had warped his heart to cruelty and crime.

He was dressed in deep black, the same style of suit worn by Black Bill who stood apart gazing upon him, and his face was covered by a somber mask.

But it did not conceal the long golden beard and hair that fell upon his shoulders in waving masses.

Drawn over the limb, the lariat that suspended the man was made fast to a stake driven in the ground some few yards from the tree.

Near this stake stood two men, tall, broad-shouldered, deep-chested fellows, with handsome, fearless faces, and one of them wearing gauntlet gloves upon his hands.

That they were the executioners of the hanging man there could be no doubt, and they gazed with stern faces upon him.

Stepping forward, one of the two (he who wore no gloves) reached up his hand and placed his fingers upon the pulse of the hanging man.

"He is dead," he said simply.

"You are sure?" asked the other.

"Perfectly sure."

"There must be no doubt."

"There is none."

"Enough," and turning, the last speaker called to the woman:

"Come here, Helen Weldon!"

She made a step forward, turned, walked to her horse, and springing lightly into her saddle, rode up to the spot.

"Your brother is dead, Helen Weldon, and I have avenged poor Edgar Elgin and my sister. The body is in your hands now, and your two confederates yonder can bury it.

"Then, I warn you, Black Bill and Pathfinder, to leave this region forever, and woe be unto you if you do not heed my warning.

"You are equally guilty with your brother, Blonde Bill; but you are a woman and I spare you.

"Those men, Black Bill and Pathfinder, also deserve hanging; but they kept faith with me in destroying the outlaw band, and I give them their lives.

"But their death will follow if they ever are seen near Golden Gulch again.

"Now, beautiful fiend that you are, I say to you, repent of your crimes and sin no more, and may God have mercy upon that man," and Horace Hammond, the Kid Glove Miner, pointed at the hanging form as he spoke.

"Have you more to say, Horace Hammond?" asked the woman in a hoarse, quivering voice.

"No."

"Then hear me."

As she spoke she turned to the companion of the Kid Glove Miner, and said:

"My pistols are unloaded, my knife you have taken from me, so cut the bonds that hold my brother's hands, please."

The one addressed stepped quickly forward, drew his bowie knife and severed the bonds.

Then the woman clasped the hand of her dead brother in her own and raised it to her lips, while she said impressively:

"Dead! yes, you are dead, my poor brother, and that man has murdered you.

"But I live, and before high Heaven, Horace Hammond, I vow that you and yours shall rue this deed!"

She still grasped the hand of her dead brother, while she pointed to Horace Hammond as she spoke; and in spite of his iron nerve he shuddered, for he felt that the beautiful outlaw would do all in her power to keep her vow.

CHAPTER V.

A SENSATION IN GOLDEN GULCH.

GOLDEN GULCH was in a fever of excitement once more.

It had just toned down, after the excitement of the destruction of the band of road-agents, and the hanging of their chief, Blonde Bill, when the news was sprung upon the community that Faro Fred had reformed, sold out his Temple of Fortune, and was about to marry Fanchita Kingsley, a young lady who had come to that enterprising locality in the garb of manhood, but had resumed her feminine attire to become the wife of the gambler, he having rescued her from a mob who wished to hang her under the suspicion, set afloat by bad whisky and worse hearts, that she was a road-agent in disguise, spying out the passing over the road of stages with valuable freight.

Upon the top of this news was other, to the effect that Horace Hammond, known to the Gulchites as the Kid Glove Miner, was also to wed Ruby Roland, whom he had rescued from the power of Blonde Bill.

These rumors proved true, for the double wedding was celebrated at the Gold Brick Hotel, by Parson Goliath Sugarlips, a lately imported preacher into Golden Gulch, and a man who had undertaken a gigantic task in converting the miners of that remote land.

But, hardly had affairs quieted down after this interesting event, when up dashed the stage one day with Monk Harris holding the reins, and several of the horses bleeding from gun-shot wounds.

"Well, Monk, what has happened?" cried Major Simon Suggs, in alarm, realizing at once that something serious had occurred.

"Ther road-agents bev been at it ag'in," was the cool reply of the driver, as he threw the reins around the lantern and sprung from his high box, adding:

"Thar is stiffs inside," and he jerked his head toward the stage-coach, upon the polished sides of which were seen bullet-marks.

"The road-agents at it again?

"And dead bodies in your coach?" cried the stout proprietor of the Gold Brick, throwing open the stage door.

"Yas, thar is stiffs in thar, an' others likely ter be ther same, for they was hit hard," said Monk Harris, and he stepped to the door with the major, to lend a helping hand, while the few people about the hotel gathered around.

The sight that met the view of Major Suggs was a startling one.

The coach held six occupants, three of whom lay dead upon the front seat, and one more who was wounded, was supported in the arms of a man who was stanching the blood that flowed from a wound in his neck.

Upon the back seat sat a woman in deep mourning, and with a heavy veil wholly concealing her face.

The dead men were evidently miners from their dress and appearance, while the one who appeared unhurt was of a different class evidently, as he was well-dressed, and the wounded man he supported was flashily attired and would have been set down as a sport by the knowing ones.

"Let me help you out, madam," said the major, addressing the lady, for such her appearance indicated her to be.

"I am not injured, sir, so just see to that wounded man," was the calm reply.

"Yes, he needs aid, and at once.

"Have you a physician here?" said the one who held the wounded man.

"Yes; come, Monk, let us lift him out," said the major, and the wounded man was taken tenderly up in their arms and carried into the hotel, while the person who had been trying to stanch the flow of blood from his wound sprung lightly out, and, turning, said politely:

"Permit me, madam, to aid you?"

The veiled lady accepted his proffered hand, and with a low word of thanks glided on into the hotel, where Major Suggs met her and conducted her to a room, Plug Chew, a Chinee bell-boy, doing like service for the man who had been her fellow-passenger.

"Well, Monk, what does all this mean?" cried Horace Hammond, the Kid Glove Miner, as he was still called, dismounting from his horse and coming upon the hotel piazza, where stood the driver surrounded by a curious crowd.

"Ther agents is on ther road ag'in, Mr. Hammond," said Monk Harris.

"Yes, it is pretty evident that you have had a hot time of it to look at your horses, coach and its dead occupants.

"Did you attempt to run through them?"

"No, Mister Hammond, I jist put my foot on ther brake, dragged on ther lines, and then h'isted my hands when I heerd ther unexpected order to do so."

"Where did this occur?"

"At what they calls the Blonde Bill Pass, whar them ripcallions stopped ther colonel an' his darter."

"Ab, yes; but did they fire upon you when you halted?"

"I'll tell yer how it were.

"I wasn't lookin' fer no agents, as sin' yer raid on 'em, an' yer hangin' o' Blonde Bill, I hain't seen nor heerd o' any in these parts.

"So I were tuke suddint like when I heerd ther call ter up with my grub-grabbers an' seen a dozen men step out inter ther road ahead o' ther old hearse.

"I drawed up, as I said, but Lordy, ther were one in ther hearse who didn't mean ter be tuk that way, an' he slung open ther door an' jumped out, a shooter in each hand."

"Bravo for the brave fellow! Was he killed?" cried Horace Hammond, while a murmur of admiration ran around the crowd at the act of the daring man.

"Kilt! Waal, did yer see that tall chap in store-clothes that went inter ther hash-house jist awhile ago?"

"Yes," cried a score of voices.

"He don't look dead, nor he hain't; but he are ther liveliest pilgrim ter shoot I ever seen, fer he do equal you, Kid Gloves, an' ther are sayin' much."

"He hed dropped two agents afore they knowed they was bein' hunted, an' then out jumped ahind him that woman in black."

"The lady in mourning that I saw go into the hotel as I rode up?"

"Yas, Kid Gloves, that are she."

"She sprung out of the coach, did you say?"

"Yas, she jist jumped right out, an' in her leetle hand she held a revolver, an' without raisin' the black curt'in over her face she jist begin ter play revolver moosic too, an' I seen her drop a couple o' agnts.

"Waal, ther agnts was so tuk back ther they broke an'started ter run; but ther leader calt 'em back an' they opened fire at ther crowd, fer tbree miners I hed as riders, an' ther wounded pilgrim they carried in jist now, also jumped out an' jined in ther revolver chorus."

"I tells yer, pard all, that it were ther hottest time I have ever seen."

"Look at that coach that an' yer'll see that bullits was flyin' round, an' two o' my horses, one leader and one wheeler, is wounded, not ter speak o' ther humans."

"It didn't last more'n half a minute, but it was powerful hot work, an' in that time ther three miners went down with toes turned up forevermore, an' ther pilgrim dressed so fancy were wounded, while no less than seven agnts, ther leader among 'em, stayed right ther, fer funeral services was needed over 'em."

"An' all this time that leddy in black she jist stood ther, alongside o' the han'some chap, an' her leetle revolver kept tune with t'others, until I sw'ar I never seen ther like, an' it were lovely to look onto."

"Waal, when ther agnts digged out, ther tall feller jist slung ther passenger stiffs inter ther hearse, tuk ther wounded pilgrim up tenderly an' laid him in, ther woman havin' jumped in an' helped him."

"Then he tells me ter git fer ther Gulch, an' I sails off suddint, you bet, pard."

"And the road-agents?"

"We left ther dead ones a-lyin' right whar they dropped, an' ther live ones a-gittin', you bet."

"But who does yer think ther road-agnt Cap'n were?"

"Black Bill?" asked one.

"Nary."

"It wasn't his sister, were it?"

"No, pard."

"Who was it, Monk?" asked Horace Hammond, who had listened to the story with strange interest.

"It were the Pathfinder, Mister Hammond, what you showed marcy to ther time yer hung Blonde Bill."

"Ah! then he has met a just fate and his band has received a lesson."

"I must seek this stranger and congratulate him, and see if I can be of any service to him or his fellow-passengers."

"Do you know his name?"

"No, sir; but ther hotel book will show, fer I don't judge that he be a man that is afeerd ter write it out squar', as it were give to him at christenin'."

"And the lady? Do you know ought of her?"

"No, Pard Kid Gloves."

"She come through on Burke's hearse, as did t'others, an' I fetched 'em on here."

"She are a screamer, though, I kin sw'ar."

"And the wounded man?"

"Don't know him, sir, but he were game."

"Those killed were miners, I believe?"

"So they looks."

"Well, Monk, see that they are buried, and I will pay costs if they have no money."

"I will see the Reverend Sugarlips and ask him to bury them decently," and Horace Hammond passed on into the hotel, while the crowd gave a half-whispered cheer, the cause of which was exposed by the remark of Monk Harris:

"Now, boys, Golden Gulch are ter hev a cirkis, a raal out-an'-outer buryin', with a regular parson ter do ther plantin' in style."

"Yer bet this town are gittin' civilized."

CHAPTER VI.

A BULLY PUNISHED.

THE supper room of the Gold Brick was crowded the evening upon which the stage-coach came in with its ghastly load and its plucky survivors, for many a miner had not gone back to camp after coming to hear the news, in the hope that he would see the hero and heroine of the occasion.

The wounded man had been placed under the care of the Magic Doctor, as the physician of Golden Gulch was called, and had been reported as being severely yet not dangerously injured.

He had given his name to the doctor as Henry Hart, and his profession he had simply said was that of gambling.

The most important of the passengers, in the eyes of the Gulchites, was the man who had so boldly sprung out of the coach and attacked the road-agents, and he had written himself down upon the Gold Brick Register as

"DICK DUNWOODY, Miner."

"He are a posey of a miner when yer looks at him," said one of the crowd, and his opinion seemed to chime in with that of others as they gazed upon the stranger, who possessed a

tall, well-knit form, his massive shoulders and chest being marked, and his hands and feet remarkably small and shapely.

His face was frank, fearless, full of expression, and his features were regular and strongly cut, his mouth being particularly resolute, and yet having hovering about it a winning smile that told of a sunny-hearted nature.

Dark-gray eyes, that grew black in excitement, a brown mustache setting off his even rows of snow-white teeth, and long, dark-brown hair falling below his shoulders, made up a very handsome man, while his manner was free-and-easy, yet courtly, and his dress that of one who was fond of good clothes, yet not sufficiently so to make a dandy of himself.

A silver belt buckle was visible, his sack-coat being open, but no arms were to be seen, though all knew they were ready at hand for use if needed, as Monk Harris had said:

"I never seen him show his weepins afore ther fight; but he showed 'em then, you bet, an' used 'em too ter ther tune o' lively moosic."

He had gone up to see how his wounded fellow-passenger was, offering his services as a nurse, and had been introduced by the surgeon to Horace Hammond when he came into the room.

"I have heard of your bravery, Mr. Dunwoody, and congratulate you upon your escape," said Horace Hammond.

"Thank you, sir; but I do not consider that I did anything more than to refuse to be robbed by a gang of cut-throats."

"I am sorry for the poor men who were killed, and also for my fellow-passenger here; but it was unavoidable," answered the young man in a pleasant way.

"And the lady showed remarkable nerve, Monk Harris told me," continued Horace Hammond.

"I never saw a braver woman, sir.

"I sprung away from the coach, so as not to bring her in range of the bullets, and she was at my side in an instant, and I saw two men drop under her fire, though she never raised once her deep veil."

"Do you know who she is, sir?"

"I do not, nor could I tell you whether she is young or old, ugly or handsome; but I do know that she has an iron nerve, immense pluck, and is a dead shot."

"My wife sent up to ask if she could be of any service to her, and the answer came back in a very decided negative, and Major Suggs says she has ordered her meals sent to her room, while she wears her bonnet and veil yet."

"There is some mystery about her, I feel confident; but as it does not concern me I will not interest myself about her, though I would like to see her face, for I'll wager high that she is pretty and young, for her figure is perfect," said Dick Dunwoody, with a light laugh.

"Do you anticipate remaining in Golden Gulch, Mr. Dunwoody?" asked the doctor.

"Yes. I intend to look me up a mine and work it, and I hope to make my fortune here," he said, in his frank way.

Just then the supper-bell resounded through the hotel, and Horace Hammond asked the young miner to join him in a drink as an appetizer, and invited him to sit at his table, for he saw that whatever circumstances had caused Dick Dunwoody to come to the mines, he was certainly a gentleman.

Together they descended to the floor below, and meeting Fred Fairbanks, still called Faro Fred in spite of his having given up his gambling saloon and gone to mining, Horace introduced his new-found friend.

"By Jove, Mr. Dunwoody, but I am glad to meet a man of your pluck, for I was stopped a score of times on my way from the mine and told of the affair on the road.

"Come and take something sir," said Fred Fairbanks, in his genial, courtly way.

"We were just on our way to the bar, sir," answered Dick Dunwoody, and the three entered the saloon.

There they found a large and noisy crowd assembled, and the road-agent attack was evidently the absorbing topic of conversation, and the parts played by the young and handsome miner and the veiled lady were told over and over again as new-comers dropped in.

At sight of the miner, accompanied by Faro Fred and Horace Hammond, a voice cried:

"Thar he be now, pard, an' he are a man ter look at."

A loud cheer greeted the entrance of the young stranger, who raised his slouch hat gracefully and said:

"Gentlemen, I thank you.

"Permit me to drink your very good health, so call for what you wish."

Another cheer greeted this little speech, and for some minutes Jaques the bar-tender and his associates were busy setting up beverages for thirsty souls.

With a smile and a bow, as he dashed off his liquor, the miner turned away with Fred Fairbanks and Horace Hammond, when a burly ruffian, just drunk enough to be quarrelsome, and a bully at all times, stepped squarely before him and said insultingly:

"Pard, I hez my opinion o' a gerloot that

'lows a woman ter fight fer him, an' I wants ter know yer name."

All knew Sneaky Jim as a bad man, and one who when bent on a row would push matters to extremes.

He was a miner in hard luck, seldom came up into town, and when he did do so was avoided, as some one was sure to suffer.

Now it was very evident that the general praise accorded to the stranger angered him, and he felt it his duty to show that he did not fear the man who had so boldly confronted the road-agents.

Both Faro Fred and the Kid Glove Miner were annoyed at the bully's coming forward, and yet as he had not addressed them they could say nothing, so determined to let matters take their course, feeling confident that the stranger was capable of looking after himself.

"Is this gentleman a friend of yours?" asked the young miner, with a pleasant smile, turning to his two comp..nions, while a hush fell upon all in the room.

"I am happy to say that he is not," was Horace Hammond's quick reply.

"I axed yer name, ef yer hain't ashamed o' it?" said the bully, squaring himself before the stranger.

"My name, sir, is Dunwoody," was the calm reply.

"Done—what?" sneered Sneaky Jim.

"Done—that!" was the quick retort of Dick Dunwoody, and his fist shot forth straight from the shoulder, and, landing squarely in the bully's face, sent him flat on his back with a fall that shook the house and made the glasses on the bar ring.

A yell broke forth from half a hundred throats at this quick punishment but was checked instantly as they saw the stranger follow up his advantage by stepping forward and placing his foot upon the throat of his fallen foe, while like a flash he drew a revolver in each hand, one leveled at the prostrate man and the other covering one of the crowd who had drawn a weapon and started forward to the rescue of his pard.

"Hold, my man! this brute may be your pard; but if you do not drop that weapon I'll wager you'll go to the grave with him!"

The voice rung like a trumpet, and Gospil Sam, to whom they were addressed, dropped the weapon quickly, while he shouted out:

"I caves, stranger pard; but don't be hard on Sneaky Jim."

"He insulted me, and I punished him; so let the matter drop," said Dunwoody, as he stepped back, replaced his pistols, and walked from the saloon, accompanied by Horace Hammond and Fred Fairbanks, who were charmed with their new acquaintance.

Entering the supper room, they took him to their table, where he was presented to Colonel Roland, a fine-looking, soldierly old gentleman, and Mrs. Fairbanks and Mrs. Hammond, whom Dick Dunwoody mentally observed were two as lovely women as he had ever seen.

But the supper-hour went by, and the mysterious Veiled Lady did not appear, greatly to the disappointment of all, and her strange conduct caused the mystery surrounding her to increase greatly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY UNSOLVED.

The day following the one upon which the scenes just related occurred, Golden Gulch turned out in force to give a decent burial to the three miners who had been slain by the road-agents.

They were found to be poor fellows, with only a few dollars in their pockets, and were evidently on their way to Golden Gulch to get work in the mines when they met their sad end.

Who they were no one knew, other than that they were entered upon the stage-book as:

"Nick Cross, Miner."

"Badger Dave, "

"Unlucky Luke, " .

Which was Nick Cross or Badger Dave no one could tell, but certain it was that Luke had not been alone Unlucky.

Nor did the Gulchites care which was which, so they buried them in style, and in style they intended they should be laid away in their last resting-place.

"I tells yer, pard, they is ther first inter ther new bone-yard," said one of the citizens as a number of them stood together at the Gold Brick bar discussing the mournful affair.

This assertion was true, for the old graveyard had been filled up only a few days before, and I may add that there was hardly one-fifth of those resting there that had died a natural death.

All the rest had "died with their boots on," so to speak, and, as the manner of their "passing in their chips" was told on every head-board, it was a pleasant pastime of the survivors in Golden Gulch to spend Sunday afternoons strolling through the cemetery and reading over the very thrilling inscriptions that met their gaze.

The parson, and in fact the only minister that Golden Gulch had ever enjoyed, was to inaugurate the new burying-ground by consigning to the earth the three slain miners, and, as there was a doubt regarding the identity of each one,

the three names had been painted upon a rude cross, and this was to be placed at the head of a common grave.

The Reverend Goliath Sugarlips was certainly a contradiction to his name in both cases, for he possessed a slender form, with sloping shoulders, and thin arms and legs that had not even the photograph of a Goliath's strength, while his lips were hard and wore a look as of constant pain at the wickedness of the world.

Upon his arrival in the stage there had been a free fight raging at the door of the hotel, and this so unnerved the parson that for two days he did not leave his room.

But Faro Fred and Horace Hammond got hold of him, promised him their protection, and their wives coaxed him out for a walk, to make him acquainted with the town.

The ice once broken he had held service in the public hall, and preached from the text of Samson slaying the Philistines with the jaw-bone of a jackass.

The miners listened attentively, but many a wink passed around, and the hat, used in place of a contribution-plate was well filled.

But after service a miner said to the preacher as he was hurrying home to the hotel:

"Say, Pard Honeymouth—"

"Sugarlips is my name, my worthy brother," said the parson.

"Waal, it are all ther same, pard; but I wants ter tell yer ef yer wants ter git a strong hold on ther wicked miners o' Golden Gulch, yer herter give up lyin' an' git down ter facts, fer thar hain't a durned one o' us believed a word about thar story o' one man killin' thoursands o' sopers with a jawbone."

The Reverend Goliath Sugarlips was horrified, and began to expostulate, while he said:

"But, my brother, I preached from the text—"

"Durn ther text, Preacher Pard, what hes that got ter do with yer tryin' ter choke sich a lie down us poor miners?

"We is far from home, an' we is ignorant as cows, but yer can't lie like that, an' I advises yer fer yer own sake ter try some other leetle game, or ther boys will open on yer sure.

"Don't be skeert, fer ef yer is doin' yer best, we won't shoot yer; but ef yer lies like yer ter-day, yer'll never pound another pulpit."

"Good-by, pard, an' put this leetle dust inter yer pocket, an' put my advice along with it."

Parson Sugarlips pocketed the very generous offering of the miner, and as he hastened on, mentally resolved to be more particular in his selection of texts in future.

Upon leaving his room to perform the funeral services over the three dead miners, he received sundry invitations to take a drink.

"Better liquor up a bit, parson," cried one.

"It are damp in ther bone-yard, pard, an' yer better surround suthin'," said another.

"Come, pard parson, let Jaques give yer a drink as will raise ther cockles on yer heart, an' make per shout scripture 'til yer gits us all ter weepin'."

"Toss off four fingers, parson, an' yer'll feel like a fightin'-cock."

These invitations were all meant in kindness, but were refused with thanks, and the Reverend Goliath Sugarlips hurried on to the mournful duty in hand, and soon after the procession moved toward the cemetery, where the three miners were duly buried, and Golden Gulch was happy in having a new cemetery.

As Dick Dunwoody returned to the hotel, for he had attended the funeral with Major Simon Suggs, he found the stage-coach before the door just ready to pull out on the trip East.

Monk Harris was coming out of the bar, pulling on his driving-gloves, preparatory to mounting his box, when he said to the young miner, in a low tone:

"I wish you was along to-day, pard, for I takes out considerable dust, an' besides, ther heathen Chinee thar hes jist told me ther Veiled Leddy were ter return with me."

"I have made an engagement to see a mine this afternoon, Harris, or I would go."

"But I don't think you will be molested to-day, as yesterday's lesson will keep the agents quiet, at least for a while."

"It may drive 'em off ther Overland trail altogether, pard, an' I, for one, won't weep."

"But you say the Veiled Lady is to return with you?" asked the miner, in surprise.

"So Plug Chew, ther Chinee, jist told me."

"Did you know this, major?" and Dunwoody turned to the Gold Brick's landlord, who answered:

"I did not, sir; but what she came here for I do not know, for not a question has she asked of any one that I have heard of— Ah! there she comes now."

As the major spoke the lady referred to came out upon the piazza and descended the steps to the stage-coach.

She was dressed in her mourning garb, as on the day before, and wore her heavy, impenetrable veil.

Gallantly the young miner stepped forward to assist her into the coach, when she said, in a strangely sweet voice:

"Thank you, sir, but I will ride upon the box with the driver, if he does not object!"

"No indeed, leddy; Monk Harris don't object ter ther comp'ny o' a young, purty an' plucky woman, as I kin sw'ar you ter be, ef I can't see yer face," was the gallant answer.

She made no reply, but declining the proffered assistance, stepped up to the box with a grace and ease that was surprising.

Instantly Monk Harris sprung to his seat, and called out:

"Any more pilgrims, major?"

"None, Monk, the coach goes out empty."

"Guess the agents has scared folks off."

"G'lang, ponies!" and away darted the lumbering coach, the mysterious woman upon the box a greater mystery than ever to the denizens of Golden Gulch.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VAILED LADY SHOWS HER HAND.

In spite of his not having seen her face, and in fact that he was not able to tell whether she was pale-face, red-skin or African, Monk Harris was really glad of the companionship on his trip out of the Vailed Lady.

"She are a mystery, they says; but I guesses I kin find out suthin' about her, fer wimmins is bound ter talk," he mentally observed.

He had witnessed her display of nerve the day before, and also saw that her aim had been deadly, and he was certain that she possessed a very beautiful form, while, if her face was judged by the same criterion, it must be also lovely.

Her voice too, was soft and sweet, and yet, though he had privately questioned Plug Chew who served her meals, and the chambermaid who looked after her room, he could not discover that either of them had seen her without her veil and black kid gloves.

"Waal, I'll try my hand, an' I guesses I'll be able ter win drinks on what I finds out, when I gits back to ther Gulch," muttered Monk Harris.

Settling himself well in his seat, he cracked his whip, and the team sprung quickly forward.

"Them is a fine team, miss," he said as a feeler.

"Yes, they seem to travel nicely."

"Will you allow me to drive, please?"

"Sartin, miss, but they is hard pullers fer your leetle hands," he answered.

But he relinquished the reins, and the manner in which she took them caused him to say:

"Yer hev held the ribbons afore, miss?"

"Oh yes, I am a good driver," was the reply.

"I bet yer," responded Monk, as he saw her wheel the swiftly-running horses out of a hole in the road, and then let them dash along, managing them with an ease and strength that was remarkable.

"Whar did yer larn-ter handle ther ribbons, leddy?" asked Monk, admiringly.

"Oh, I have driven ever since I was a child."

"Yer voice are as sweet an' soft as a leetle child's now, an' I guesses yer hain't so very old," suggested Monk as another "feeler."

"I am no child, but a woman, and one who has known what it is to suffer," she said in a voice that suddenly became almost harsh.

"I doesn't doubt it, miss, fer yer black dress shows yer is mournin' fer some kinfolks—may be it are your husband that are dead?"

"No; I was never married," was the low reply.

"It hain't likely yer'll be let go long, miss, fer wimmins sich as you is, is skeerce I'll sw'ar, an' thar is plenty o' fellers ter pick yer up."

"I never intend to marry, Mr. Harris," she said firmly.

"Waal, you knows best; but it do seem ter me that a young feller sich as that miner proved himself ter be yesterday c'u'd win ther heart o' a wooden gal."

A silvery laugh came from under the veil at this; but she asked seriously a moment after:

"Do you know who that man is, Mr. Harris?"

"No, miss, only that he says his name are Dick Dunwoody, and that he are a miner."

"You do not know where he is from?"

"No, miss, nor whar he are goin'; but I does know that he are chained lightnin' let loose in a fight, an' hes ther look o' a squar' man."

"He certainly has the appearance of being every inch a man, and he is as cool as an icicle under fire and is a dead shot."

"You ain't no screechin'-owl in danger, miss, an' as fer shootin', waal, yer bullet goes jist whar yer sends 'em."

"I guesses yer is ust ter handlin' weepins?"

"Yes; I have killed men before yesterday," was the startling and cool reply.

"Waal!" was Monk's only remark, but it expressed his amazement.

And on the stage rolled, the Vailed Lady still driving, up hill and down, and winning the greater admiration of Monk Harris, to whom she at last relinquished the reins, with the remark:

"I am a little tired now."

"Yes, miss, an' I are surprised that yer c'u'd

hold 'em so long, fer they has iron jaws, them leaders has."

"But yonder are ther graveyard yer helped ter make yesterday," and Monk Harris pointed on ahead with his whip to where a row of newly made graves could be seen.

"Ah! who buried them?" she asked quickly.

"Faro Fred sent out a party to do it, an' ter see if they c'u'd find ther road-agents."

"And they could not find them?"

"No, miss, but they seen that trail leadin' up inter ther mountains."

The stage was now passing the scene of the fierce fight of the day before, and Monk Harris slackened speed a little and watched the woman as she sat by his side.

But she gave only a casual glance at the graves, two of which her own hand had filled and appeared to be looking straight on up the trail.

At last, as the stage neared a deep canyon, she said:

"There is a good place to be halted by road-agents, if they knew that you carried such valuable freight as you do."

"Yes, it are ther place I hates wuss un any on ther road, miss."

"But thar hain't nobody knowed I were to carry a big lot o' dust this trip out."

"And you expect to get it through in safety?" quietly asked the woman.

"Yas, miss."

"You never shall, for the gold box you carry I shall claim. Quick! come to a halt and up with your hands or you die!"

The words fell with startling distinctness upon the ears of Monk Harris, and, as the woman spoke she pressed a revolver hard against his head, while her finger rested upon the trigger.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLACK VAIL TORN OFF.

"I say, leddy pard, are this a leetle joke yer is playin' on me?"

The speaker was Monk Harris, and he sat upon the box of his coach, the revolver of the Vailed Lady held to his temple.

He had brought his team to a halt, his foot was upon the brake, and his hands firmly held the reins, while he showed no sign of fear.

The woman stood up, one hand upon the driver's shoulder, and the other holding the revolver against his head.

Her black veil wholly concealed her face, but her words had come distinct and threatening from beneath it:

"Quick! come to a halt and up with your hands, or you die!"

Monk Harris had driven the Overland trails for years, and many and many a time had he heard the same command, yet never before from the lips of a woman.

Involuntarily he had halted his team, and then said the words that open this chapter.

"Come, twist your reins around that lantern and up with your hands, my man!" again came the stern command.

"Waal, ef yer is jokin', yer hes it in yer ter play it well; but, I begs yer ter tarn that weepin away from my noddle, fer I hain't no desire ter die, even ef it are by ther hand o' a pretty woman."

The Vailed Lady made no reply, but placed to her lips a small gold whistle, hanging about her neck by a chain, and blew one long, shrill blast.

"Durn my pictur', ef I don't believes yer means ter rob me, ef yer is a woman," cried Monk Harris, now becoming convinced that his vailed and mysterious passenger was playing no part, but in deadly earnest.

He had with him under the boot, some twenty thousand dollars in gold-dust, and he was no man to yield it without a struggle, if there was the slightest chance in his favor.

He knew that he could crush the woman in his powerful arms, did he grasp her; but the act might cause that slender gloved forefinger that rested upon the trigger, to send a bullet through his brain.

She had blown a shrill call, and he would wait to see whether it was to frighten him with the idea that she had aid at hand, or if she really had assistance near.

He had but a moment to wait to decide upon this, as the clatter of hoofs was heard, and there rode into view, coming down the narrow canyon, a party of ten men.

They were all mounted upon jet-black horses, wore black clothing and masks, and were armed to the teeth, each one carrying a revolver in his right hand, and his bridle-rein in his left, as though ready for work of a desperate character.

"Waal, ef they hain't ther Black Brotherhood, or thar ghosts, yer kin hitch me up an' drive me fer a mule," said Monk Harris, in amazement, as the horsemen filed upon either side of the coach, and came to a halt, while a lone horse, a beautiful animal with sable and glossy hide, trotted up to the leaders of the coach and halted.

This horse bore a lady's saddle, and Monk Harris was now satisfied as to who the mysterious Vailed Lady was.

"Yer is a robber queen, or I lies," he said.

"I am Queen Helen the Avenger, Mr. Harris, and these are my gallant men," was the reply.

"Waal, I are done fer, ther are a fact."

"You shall not be harmed, but I will trouble you for the bags of gold you carry in the boot, as they belong to a company that can well afford to give that sum to Queen Helen, as their first-offering to her demand to deliver upon the highway."

"Yer means it?"

"I do."

"Ther money belongs ter two o' ther squarest men in these parts."

"It belongs to Fred Fairbanks and Horace Hammond, whom the miners call Faro Fred and the Kid Glove Sport," was the stern response.

"It do fer a fact."

"I know them both, and they are my foes—especially Horace Hammond, and upon him will I visit my deepest revenge."

The voice grew harsh with passion as she spoke, and Monk Harris said quickly:

"How on 'arth hes he injured you?"

"I will tell you, and you bear to him my words:

"I went to Golden Gulch to find out just how matters stood, and I discovered all that I wished to know. I found that Horace Hammond was happy with his wife, and that his mine was paying handsomely. I found that you were to bring out this gold with you to-day, so I came with you to rob you of it. Horace Hammond killed my poor brother, he whom men called Blonde Bill—"

"Lordy! Now I knows yer!" cried Monk Harris.

"Yes, and you will know more of me if you continue to drive the Overland trail, for I will haunt it day and night, and so tell your Vigilantes of Golden Gulch. Tell Horace Hammond that he will remember, when I held my brother's hand as he was hanging, I vowed revenge.

"Tell him I afterward knelt upon his grave and repeated that vow, and that now I intend to keep it, and give him fair warning. I will strike when and how I can, against him and all he cares for."

"Now my men shall take his gold, and you may go on your way, only bear my message as I tell you."

"Lordy! Ef you hain't the daisy o' a gal devil, then I hain't no jedge o' human natur'. But what in thunder did yer let inter yer own gang fer yesterday, when they tackled us?"

"Those men were not my band, and I knew nothing of them until I saw their leader, Pathfinder, dead. I suppose that he took to the road, and his first stroke was a failure. Mine is a success, for I get twenty thousand in gold. So hand out those gold bags to my men!"

"I'll see yer durned fust, ef yer is a woman, fer I don't help yer rob ther coach!"

The woman laughed, and bending over she raised the heavy bags with an ease that showed she possessed remarkable strength, and handed them down to her men upon either side.

Then she suddenly threw back her veil, and exposed a face of rare loveliness, and yet it was the face such as a fallen angel might possess.

Perfect in every feature, tinted with the rosy hue of health, with dreamy, passionate eyes that burned at times like living flames, it was a face to madden with love or to shrink from in fear.

"Waal, ef you isn't a shrieakin' beauty, I are a liar; but it are a durned pity yer face are so full o' angil, an' yer heart so full o' devil—it are, fer a shame!" bluntly and fearfully said Monk Harris.

The woman laughed lightly, and sprung to the ground, when a call brought her horse to her side.

With wonderful ease she leaped into the saddle, and waving her hand to Monk Harris, rode down the canyon, followed by her masked riders in single file.

CHAPTER X.

THE AMAZON'S THREAT.

WHEN Monk Harris returned over the trail to Golden Gulch, on the day following his adventure with the vailed woman who had so cleverly robbed him of the treasure he had been carrying, he looked askance at the spot where it had occurred as he drove into the canyon.

He had several passengers within the stage, and thinking it but just to warn them of danger that might be ahead, he called out:

"I say, pilgrims!"

A man, a store-keeper in Golden Gulch, put his head out of the coach in answer, and called out:

"What is it, Monk?"

"You know this is whar they jumped me yesterday, as I told yer all back at ther station."

"Yes."

"Wal, we is jist as likely ter be jumped ag'in, so ef yer hears any shootin' don't act foolish, fer we ain't got the miner feller along ter day ter sail inter ther gang."

"What shall we do, Monk?" asked the store-keeper, while an anxious face peered out of the other window.

"Jist say yer pra'ers an' keep still."

"Ef yer has dust ter shed, prepare ter shed it now," as Shakespoke w'u'd say ef he were a pilgrim in this here hearse."

"You expect trouble, then?"

"I hain't any idea what may turn up, only don't yer be astonished ef that is ther devil ter pay an' no pitch hot."

Hardly had the words left the lips of Monk Harris when, in ringing tones, musical and distinct, was heard:

"Halt! hands up!"

"I halts, an' up goes my bit-pullers," coolly said Monk Harris, raising his hands above his head the moment he had drawn his team to a standstill, while the two heads popped back in the coach with ludicrous alacrity.

As the stage came to a halt, out from a break in the canyon rode a person on horseback.

It was a woman, and one glance was sufficient to see that it was the Vailed Lady of the day before.

"Wal, yer is a dandy, or I lies!" averred Monk Harris as she appeared, and he added: "Yer looks as pretty as a angel as is a thoroughbred devil."

The woman smiled sweetly and rode to the side of the coach.

She was mounted on a superb black stallion, and her bridle was of gold links, even to the rein. The saddle was covered by the finest skins, and upon the right horn was a halter containing a revolver, while two more weapons of a like character were in the housing upon either side.

The woman had changed her garb of the day before for a black, close-fitting riding habit, a broad-brimmed sombrero, with a heavy sable plume fastened upon one side of it by a gold pin representing a tree with a man hanging thereto—a hideous trinket to wear, and a gold cord, a miniature lariat, encircled the brim.

Upon her hands were gauntlet gloves, and about her slender waist was a belt of gold links, and it upheld two revolvers and a bowie-knife.

She was certainly a magnificent creature to look upon, and the driver, and those within the coach gazed upon her with feelings of admiration, yet akin to dread.

One revolver taken from her belt she now held in her right hand, and riding close up to the stage, she called out:

"Well, Harris, we meet again."

"Yes, an' durned sorry am I thet we does," was the blunt and honest reply.

The woman gave vent to a silvery laugh, and said:

"Who have you on your list to-day?"

"As pilgrims?"

"Yes."

"Yer kin look inter ther hearse an' see fer yerself."

She rode close, threw open the door fearlessly, and gazed within.

"You are a store-keeper from Golden Gulch?" she queried, gazing at the personage who had been talking to Monk Harris when her startling summons to halt was heard.

"I am."

"Returning from purchasing goods, doubtless?"

"Yes."

"Then you have little or no money now. Next time I'll catch you on the way out. And you are a miner, I believe?" and she addressed a rough-looking individual upon the front seat.

"I are jist that."

"Going to Golden Gulch to hunt work?"

"I are."

"You can pass, too."

"You are a preacher, I believe?" and she turned her eyes upon the scared-faced individual who had been looking out of the other window of the coach when it entered the canyon.

"Yes, by the blessings of Providence, I have been inspired to preach the Gospel, and to lead erring souls away from the brink of sin," he said in a sepulchral tone, and with his eyes rolling upward, while he clasped his hands devoutly over a Bible he held in them.

"You are as Monk Harris would say, a howling old liar," said the woman, sternly.

All started at this, and Monk Harris, who was leaning over the stage-box and looking on with interest, cried:

"Bones in ther boneyard! but don't yer let up on Sky Pirates, Miss Road Agent?"

"Yes, if this man is what he says he is; but I know him to be a speculator, coming out with money to buy up the claims of poor miners, and I shall bleed him."

"Come, you Reverend Fraud, give me that wallet of bank-bills you have secreted in your boot-leg."

"Woman, avaunt! or I will call down the curses of—"

"You'll hand over that wallet!" and the revolver covered his head, and the hand that held it was as firm as iron.

"I have no money, for I am—"

"I will give you one minute to obey."

She took from her bosom a small watch and gazed upon it.

"Dust are cheaper than blood, pard. Better hand over!" called out Monk Harris.

With a groan the man stooped over, drew up

the leg of his pants and handed over the well-filled wallet.

"Is this all that you have?"

"Excepting a few dollars, yes."

"Then take these back, for I would not leave you destitute in a strange land," and she threw him several bills of large denomination.

He grasped them eagerly, without thanks, and said:

"How did you know that I had that wallet and was not a preacher?"

"You confided the news to a fellow-passenger who was one of my spies."

"You had better be more careful in future."

"And you, madam?" and the outlaw queen turned to a woman who sat on the back seat of the stage-coach.

"I have but little money, and am going to join my husband, who is a merchant in Golden Gulch," she said, and added:

"What little I have you are welcome to."

"No, I have enough here," and she thrust the wallet into a saddle-pocket.

Then, with a smile, she turned to the driver and said:

"Harris, I have done well upon both of your trips, so will let up on you for two weeks."

"But I wish you to hand this letter to its address."

She took from a saddle-pocket a letter, bordered with black, and addressed:

"To HORACE HALE HAMMOND, ESQ.,

THE ELGIN MINE.

Kindness of

MR. MONK HARRIS,

STAGE DRIVER

GOLDEN GULCH OVERLAND TRAIL."

"I'll give it ter ther Kid Glove Miner, fer I see it are writ on ther back fer him," said Monk Harris.

"Yes, and I will expect an answer, and will be here to receive it," was the cool reply.

"He might come hisself ter deliver ther letter," said Monk.

"If he does the stage will be allowed to pass unhalted."

"How will yer know if he are inside?"

"I will know, so don't fool yourself by thinking that I can be caught in any trap."

"I seek revenge against Horace Hammond and all he loves, but I'll wait my own good time to strike, and this threat you can tell him."

"Now drive on!"

"I'll do it, an' no thanks ter you, my gal dandy," and the stage rolled on down the canyon, leaving the beautiful outlaw seated upon her horse, gazing coolly after it until it disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAIR OUTLAW'S LETTER.

MONK HARRIS drove up to the door of the Gold Brick very slowly, and not at all in his usual style.

"Hes he got ther hearse full o' stiffs?" asked one who saw the vehicle coming.

"It do look as tho' he were coming with a fun'ral," answered the one addressed.

But Monk felt blue, for he had to report to the men he most respected in the world that they were twenty thousand dollars poorer than when they had intrusted him with their gold-dust.

And more, on his way back one of his passengers had been robbed, and he began to feel that luck was turning against him.

Seated upon the piazza, as he drove up were Horace Hammond, Dick Dunwoody the young miner hero, and the surgeon of Golden Gulch, Frank Powell, generally called the Magic Doctor, on account of his wonderful skill as a man of surgery and medicine.

"Well, Monk, what ails you?" called out Doctor Powell as the stage came to a halt.

"I hev seen thet which makes me sick, Doc," was the sad reply, as Monk Harris threw down his reins and came up and joined the group.

"What was it, Monk, a ghost?"

"No, Doc, it were suthin' wuss nor a ghost."

"I cannot understand what it could have been, Monk," said Horace Hammond, with a smile.

"It were a woman."

All laughed at this, while Dr. Powell remarked:

"I thought you were an admirer of the fair sex, Monk."

"I is an' I isn't; fer it depends upon what one I has ter admire."

"Yer know ther Vailed Leddy I went away from heur with yesterday?"

"No, we do not know her, and that is what we want to find out."

"She are ther devil."

"In petticoats, Monk?" and they all laughed at the serious manner of the driver.

"Oh, this hain't no grinnin' matter, pard, fer I tells yer thet woman are ther devil."

"Tell us about her, Monk," asked Dick Dunwoody, for all now saw that the stage-driver had something to tell of a serious nature, and all of them were certainly interested in, and curi-

ous about the vailed woman, for she had been the subject of conversation all over Golden Gulch.

"Yer seen her mount to ther box with me?"

All nodded assent.

"Waal, she soon tuk ther ribbons, and Lordy! how she did drive."

"She has gut iron strength in them leetle hands o' hern."

"Waal, we struck ther narrer canyon up in ther mountains, an' all of a suddint she give me ther ribbons an' clapped a six-shooter ag'in' my head."

"What?" and every man of the three was now all attention.

"Fact!"

"But I tried ter think she were jokin', but it wasn't even the photograph o' a joke."

"No, pard, she were in dead yearnest, I kin sw'ar."

"Waal, she jist told me ter hand over ther gold-bags I carried in ther boot."

"Hal my gold-dust," cried Horace Hammond. "Sartin, pard, they was your gold-bags."

"And she got them?"

"Now I guess so; fer, when I begin ter talk fight, she just blew a leetle blow on a whistle, an' out o' a break in ther canyon rode ten men."

"By Heaven! the woman proved, then, to be a man after all, and is chief of a band of road-agents," cried Horace Hammond.

"No, pard, she are a woman; thet are true, fer ther ten fellers brought with 'em a horse with a lady's saddle on his back."

"They was all dressed in black, an' havin' masks on, while they was armed ter ther full extent o' ther law."

"I tells yer them bags was tuk out, fer I w'u'dn't help 'em ter rob yer, an' they rode off and I driv on."

"This looks bad," said Horace Hammond.

"It are badder still, Mr. Hammond, fer I were stopped ag'in ter-day."

"You was?"

"I were fer a fact."

"Jist in ther canyon I got orders ter halt an' h'ist my han's an' I sent 'em up in lively fashion."

"Then ther woman rode alongside, an' Lordy, but she were a beauty."

"She hed a black horse as was han'some as a pictur', a gold bridle, an' saddle all trimmed up with pretty skins and bird feathers, and with shooters stickin' all around on it convenient fer her clutch."

"She were drest in black, hed a posey of a hat on, with a pin thet looked like a tree, with a man hangin' on it, an' a gold lariat an' feathers ornamen'tin' ther sombrero."

"I tell yer she were a stunner, an' she did a thrivin' biz, fer she let off all in ther hearse, 'ceptin' a pilgrim as was travelin' as a Bible buccaneer, when he were no pulpit-pounder at all, only a spekilater tryin' ter save his dust by puttin' on lamb's clothin'."

"She scooped him in, told me she'd let up on me fer a couple o' weeks, an' g'i'n me a letter fer you, Mister Hammond, with ther threat that she intended ter one day go fer you fer revenge."

"Ah! what has she against me?" coolly said Horace Hammond.

"She may hev told yer in ther letter."

"Ah, yes; where is it?"

"Here it is," and Monk Harris handed over the letter.

Horace Hammond took it, and his face flushed, and then paled as he glanced at the writing.

"It is from our fair friend of the valley, Powell," he said, with a smile.

"Ha! the woman whom you let go free!"

"Yes."

"The sister of Blonde Bill?"

"Yes."

"She vowed vengeance against you then."

"True, and she means to keep her vow if in her power."

"Now we will see what her letter says," and he broke the seal, and read, first to himself, and then aloud, as follows:

"IN CAMP, Friday.

"HORACE HAMMOND:—

"SIR:—Because some little time has passed away since you murdered my poor brother, you may have thought that the vow I made when I held his lifeless hand was an idle one.

"If so, it shows how little you know me."

"Such men I have with me now, for I am at the head of an outlaw band."

"I call them my 'Ghouls,'" and you will find that the name fits them before I am driven from the overland trails.

"You and yours I have marked especially for my victims, and to-day I struck my first blow, but it was at your pocket."

"I am a Nemesis upon your track, and woe be unto you and those you love, Horace Hammond."

"HELEN WELDON.

"Alias QUEEN HELEN.

"The Amazon of the Overland."

Horace Hammond's handsome face did not change even as he read the letter, but into his eyes came a look that would have made the Amazon of the Overland feel that he was one who could strike back.

"My friend, this is but the idle ravings of a crazy woman; but I beg of you not to let my wife know that Queen Helen, as she calls herself, has made such threats."

"Certainly not, for it would worry her," said Frank Powell.

"It does worry me, Horace, but for you?" and the beautiful young wife glided to the side of her husband.

"Durnation! ther cat are out o' ther bag now, that are sartin'," said Monk Harris.

"Fanchita and myself, you seemed to forget, were in the sitting-room, and we heard the letter read."

"Yes, Mr. Hammond, and, though I do not wish to say anything to give needless alarm, I hope you will feel that I have had cause of knowing when I tell you that Helen Weldon will keep her vow if in her power," and Fanchita Fairbanks, Faro Fred's pretty wife, leaned out of the sitting-room window.

"I do not doubt but that she will try, so I will be upon my guard."

"Now, Ruby, dismiss the matter from your mind, for I am not going to allow that woman to get the best of me," said Horace Hammond, while Dr. Powell remarked:

"It is one thing to threaten and make a vow, and another to keep it."

"Yes; and her letter has placed you upon your guard, Hammond, and forewarned is being forearmed," put in Dick Dunwoody, the young miner.

But with all these assurances, the letter of Queen Helen gave to the young wife a foreboding of evil which she could not shake off.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ANSWER TO THE LETTER.

THERE was considerable excitement about the Gold Brick, the day after the reception of the warning letter from Queen Helen, when the time came for the stage to start on its way.

There appeared to be a good deal of baggage going out; a large trunk was placed on top of the coach, a circumstance that did not seem to please Monk Harris, who called out to the attendants:

"Why didn't yer put that box on ahint?"

"It are full up ahint with storekeeper traps, boss," was the reply of the understrapper, who, with others of his kind, looked upon stage-drivers as mighty personages.

"Hain't that nobody goin' over, major?" asked Monk Harris, as he mounted to his box.

"No, Monk; you go alone," answered the major.

"Waal, ther outlaw queen hev skeert ther hul o' Golden Gulch, I does believe; but I better go, all ther same," and Monk Harris gathered up his reins just as Horace Hammond came out of the hotel, and handing up a letter, said:

"Give this to Queen Helen, Monk, if you see her."

"Oh! I'll see her, pard, fer she loves ter see me go by; an' you bet she are waitin' fer ther letter."

With this Monk gave the word to his leaders, and the spirited team started off at a lively pace.

"Waal now, what in thunder hev he writ her?" mused Monk Harris, as he drove along.

"I'll ax her ef it do please her, when he reads it, fer I are willin' ter bet my wheelers ag'in' ther leaders that she'll be thar ter git ther answer. Ha! ha! ef that petticoat gal hain't skeerd 'em all in Golden Gulch, I am a liar! I doesn't think she edzactly skeers ther Kid Glove Miner, Doc Powell, Faro Fred, an' ther durned han'some chap, Dunwoody, but then they looks on wimmins as sacred, an' don't want no funny shootin' biz with 'em."

And thus talking to himself, for want of better company, Monk Harris drove along until he came to the canyon which some one in Golden Gulch had already christened as "Queen Helen's Toll Gate."

"I'll just go slow here, critters, so I kin pull up quick when I gits ther command," he said, drawing his horses to a walk.

He had gotten nearly opposite to the break in the canyon, which was nothing more than a ravine branching off from the one through which the stage-road ran, when loud, clear, and yet in the same melodious tones, came the words:

"Draw rein, Monk Harris, or take the consequences!"

"I draws rein every time, fer I hates takin' consequences. Waal, here I am!" and the driver turned toward Queen Helen, who just then rode out into the ravine in full view.

"And here I am," was the smiling reply.

"I hain't blind, fer I sees yer," grunted Monk, and then he added:

"What does yer want?"

"Who have you along?"

"Nary soul 'ceptin' ther horses, myself, an' ther luggage."

"Ah! I have frightened Golden Gulchites from traveling, it seems," and she laughed lightly.

"So it do appear fer a fact."

"It matters not who you might have had along on this trip, for you are safe from robbery, Monk Harris, for two weeks from yesterday, as I told you."

"But I must strike your pard of the ribbons, Hank Talbot."

"Like as not, fer he can't hope ter git off whar my hearse is tuk in."

"No, he shall not escape, and if you like him, and he is a good fellow, tell him to be very quick to halt when he gets the order on this road."

"Hank hain't no born fool, an' he hev druv stage long enough ter know what is which."

"It is well that he does. Now tell me if you gave my letter to Horace Hammond?"

"In course I did."

"What said he?"

"Ah! he kinder laughed as tho' he were tickled with what it said."

"He laughed, did he?" and the woman's face clouded.

But clearing instantly, she continued:

"He will find my threats bring tears, not smiles. Did he send me no answer?"

"He sent yer a letter, but I doesn't know ef it are a answer."

"Give it to me!"

"Waal, ride alongside and git it!"

"No, tie it to the end of your lash and throw it to me."

"Lordy! is yer skeert ter come close, when I tells yer thar is nobody in ther hearse?"

"Yes, distance lends enchantment just now. Do as I order you!"

The whip and lash reached a long way off, and Monk Harris fastened the letter to the cracker and tossed it to her.

She skillfully caught it, broke the seal and read its contents at a glance, while her beautiful face clouded.

"Yer don't seem as tickled at ther letter as Kid Gloves was," said Monk with a grin.

"Do you know what he has written?"

"I does not."

"Then I'll tell you if you would like to know."

"I'd be amazin' proud ter know."

"He says simply:

"Horace Hammond disregards Queen Helen and her threats."

"Thet means he don't keer a durn, don't it?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I doesn't think he does, an' I is glad he hes got ther narve ter tell yer so. But I guesses I'll drive on, ef you says so."

"Yes, go."

Just as she uttered the words, the lid of the large trunk on the top of the stage flew up, and a tall form sprung up in it.

Then there was the coil of a lariat around his head, and quick as a flash it was launched through the air directly toward the beautiful Amazon, while from the lips of the thrower came the ringing words:

"Hold, Queen Helen, of the Overland. You are wanted!"

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK DUNWOODY'S LUCK.

THE day following his arrival in Golden Gulch, Dick Dunwoody, the young miner who had so suddenly become a hero in Golden Gulch, and whose frank manner, pluck and generous nature had made him a favorite as well, bought a horse from Major Simon Suggs, and started out prospecting, as he said.

He returned to dinner, and brought in some specimens of ore which showed that he had struck luck from the start.

"I went up Crow creek," he said to Mr. Hammond and those who were at the dinner-table with him, "and I hit right upon a spot where I felt there must be gold."

"You see what I found, and I have already laid claim to my find, and start out this afternoon to see if I can't strike it richer."

"The lightning never strikes twice in the same place, Mr. Dunwoody," said Ruby Hammond.

"I do not know as to that, for I am a lucky dog."

"I shall hunt gold at any rate, and if I hit a mine that pans out more, as I think I will, I will work that first," and the hopeful young miner started off again upon his search for gold.

He took almost the same course which he had followed in the morning and, passing on through the canyon where he had located his mine, turned up into a wild ravine where his ex-

perienced eye told him he would be likely to find gold traces.

Nor was he disappointed, for he had not gone a quarter of a mile from his house, when he struck a "gold trail" which made his eyes twinkle with delight.

"Ah! here I have the vein, cropping out under this old cedar."

"Strange that the Golden Gulch miners have never discovered this before, or my other find either."

"But then I suppose the fear of the Tax-gatherers kept them from coming so far from the Gulch."

"Well, I'll work it at any rate, and if I mis-take not I have a fortune in each find."

As he spoke he was carefully examining the traces, and soon had gathered a respectable lot of glittering pieces.

Then he staked his claim to his find and retraced his way to his horse.

Arriving in sight of his mine discovere the morning, he was surprised to see two individuals busy laying their claims upon it.

Instantly he drew his horse back into the shadow of a thicket of cedars and dismounting said grimly:

"I'll look into this little game."

Having traversed the land in the morning, he knew the locality pretty well and made a flank movement upon the mine.

He knew that a ravine would bring him out just at the right spot to surprise the robbers, for that they had dogged his steps and were determined to rob him of his find he had not the slightest doubt.

He knew that no one else was aware of where his claim was located and if they claimed to have found it, he being a stranger, would have the public opinion against him.

Therefore he determined to take matters into his own hand.

A friendly pine tree hid him from view so that he was within a few paces of the two men, who had just driven their last stake and had his tied in a bundle lying at their feet.

"Waal, Sneaky, we is in luck, fer ther pilgrim won't dare go ag'in' both o' us," said Gospil Sam, for the pair were the very worthies who had been so humbled by Dick Dunwoody in the saloon of the Gold Brick.

"I say, Gospil, it are better in my opinion ter git rid o' ther fresh altergither.

"Yer see he hev gone on lookin' fer more dust, an' jist as like as not he'll find it."

"Waal?"

"Ef he does, we kin claim that find too, you takin' one, an' I t'other, or workin' both as pards."

"Waal, go on with yer idees."

"Ef we gits rid o' ther pilgrim—"

"Yer means calls him in?"

"Yas."

"I sees."

"Waal, then we are all O. K."

"Thet are sartin."

"But how is we ter do it?"

"He hev gone on up ther ravine?"

"Yas."

"Tain't likely he'll be back afore dark."

"No."

"We kin jist lay for him here, an' both of us draw a bead on him."

"Thet are sartin."

"Thar be places in these mountings whar we kin hide him an' his horse whar nobody kin find 'em ontill Judgement."

"Yas, an' ther S'archin' Angil hes got ter w'ar specs ter find 'em then."

"You says do it, pard?"

"I does."

"Then it's a go for sartin."

"Whar is we ter lay ther ambush ter trap him?"

"Right here!" and Dick Dunwoody stepped into view.

A cry, mingled with a curse, broke from the lips of the two men, as they beheld their intended victim spring toward them, a revolver in each hand.

"Throw up your hands!"

The voice was stern, the eyes flashed fire, and there was no mistaking the fact that the revolvers were cocked, covered their hearts, and were held in hands as firm as a rock.

Up went the bands of the desperadoes, while Gospil Sam whined out:

"Say, pard, what are yer about, ther yer runs on 'spectable miners this-a-way?"

Dick Dunwoody made no answer to the question, but stepped up to the speaker, and said sternly:

"Turn your back, sir, quick!"

With an oath the desperado obeyed.

"Now, sir, you step to this man's side, and also turn your back to me!"

"Cuss yer," growled Sneaky Jim as he obeyed.

Then, covering them with one revolver, with his other hand the miner reached around and unbuckled their

had about his shoulders, Dick Dunwoody securely bound their hands behind them, after which he restaked his claim, taking their stakes and tying them in a bundle.

"Where are your horses?" he asked.

"Down the canyon, thar."

"Well, we will ride back to Golden Gulch," was the reply, and marching his prisoners to where he had left his own animal, he mounted and drove them before him to where their horses had been hitched.

Aiding them to mount, and tying the animals together, while he took one end of the lariat, he set off with his prisoners to Golden Gulch.

It was a daring thing for a stranger to do, to carry two miners through their own camp as prisoners; but Dick Dunwoody was just the man to do it.

A number of idlers spied them coming, and gathered on the side of the road, and the prisoners called out to be rescued, but the handsome young miner's smiling face seemed to indicate resistance to the bitter end, and he passed them safety the first camp.

"Hello, pard, what are wrong?" cried a burly ruffian, a giant in size, and who was known as a desperado of the worst type.

"This geroo are stealin' a find from us, an' nabbed us while we was sleepin'," said Sneaking Jim.

"Say, stranger, them is pards o' mine, an' I says as how yer has ter give 'em up, or fight," and the giant sprung directly in front of the prisoners, bringing the horses to a halt.

"I prefer to fight," was the cool reply.

"Yer does, does yer?" shrieked the bully.

"Yes, for these rascals I caught stealing my find, as I can prove by a map I drew of my claim this morning, and now have at the hotel.

"I heard them lay a plot to ambush and kill me, and I turned the tables upon them, and shall deliver them up to the Vigilantes."

"I guesses not," cried Giant Jack, as the bully was called.

"Who will prevent me?" calmly asked Dick Dunwoody.

"I will do it."

"Then the sooner you set about the work the sooner you will know whether you can do it or not."

"Yer dares me?" shouted the giant bully.

"I tell you frankly that if you attempt to release those prisoners I will kill you."

"You will?"

"I will, most certainly."

"Move on there, men!"

The prisoners did not do aught to make their horses move on, and the young miner said, sternly:

"If you do not move on I'll clip an ear of each of you, as a sample of what you'll get if you continue to refuse."

"Move on, I say, men!"

"Don't do it, pard. He don't dare shoot in this heur crowd," shouted the bully.

Quick as lightning there came two pistol-shots, and a cry broke from the lips of the prisoners, as a stream of blood was seen to flow from the right ear of one and the left ear of the other, the bullets, unerringly aimed, having cut through them.

"Durnation! thet are yer game, are it?" and Giant Jack jerked out his revolver.

But, before he could level it, Dick Dunwoody held a weapon in each hand, and said, sternly:

"Drop that pistol, sir!"

Just then up dashed four horsemen, and ranged themselves alongside of the daring miner.

They were Colonel Roland, Faro Fred, Horace Hammond and Doctor Powell, and they were on their way to the Gold Brick Hotel.

Each of the four held a revolver in his hand, and the crowd, of fully two-score men, were also ready for a row.

"What is it, Dunwoody?" cried Doctor Powell.

"These men I caught stealing my claim, and I heard their plot to ambush and kill me."

"I captured them, and this bully and his gang threaten to release the cut-throats, and I now tell him again to drop that weapon."

Giant Jack was in a tight place, and he knew it.

The fame of the young miner had already floated through the Golden Gulch camps, and it was very evident that the four most popular men in the mines would back him up.

On the other hand he was befriending two well known hard citizens, and his backers were on a par with them and with himself, and they were already under the eye of the Vigilantes.

Still, he held a certain prestige in Golden Gulch, he had said he would rescue the prisoners, and he dared not back down.

As he stood he was half protected by the body and horse of Gospil Sam, and he felt that he must risk a shot to kill the young miner.

If he did kill him, he would gain a name for himself.

Quick as a flash then he sprung to better shelter in front of the prisoners and their horses, and his revolver flashed as he did so.

A second after the weapon of Dick Dunwoody flashed, and, although but a small portion of the desperado's head was visible, it went dashing through it.

Then, quick as lightning the young miner wheeled toward the crowd, and with a weapon in each hand called out:

"Does any one bar my way now?"

There had been several other shots from the crowd; but if aimed at the young miner they had missed their mark.

But, with the fall of Giant Jack not a man moved, and, in some mysterious way, each one of the crowd seemed to have gotten rid of his weapon, and silence rested upon all.

"Dunwoody, you deserve a vote of thanks from all law-abiding miners for calling in the checks of that huge devil," said Doctor Powell, dismounting and bending over the ruffian, while he continued:

"Shot dead, for your bullet crashed through his brain."

"Hello! you wounded Gospil Sam, and you too, Sneaky Jim?" and the doctor looked up at the bleeding ears.

"No, they are not hurt for I merely clipped them as a hint to move on," said Dick Dunwoody, and turning to the crowd, he tossed a roll of bills to one of the most respectable looking of the crowd, and continued:

"Here, pard, you and your comrades give that dead man a good burial, and if the expenses are more than you have there, come to me for the money."

"Move on, men!"

The prisoners knew that the last order was to them and they obeyed promptly, while the fickle crowd broke forth in a cheer for the miner, and slayer of Giant Jack, whom they mentally determined to plant cheap, and drink up the surplus of burial funds.

Riding on to the hotel, with his four companions, who had come to his aid if needed, and his prisoners, Dick Dunwoody told his story to the Vigilante captain, who said:

"Well, Mr. Dunwoody, you can pass sentence upon them, and I will see that the Golden Gulch Jury, as we call our Regulators, will carry it out."

"Thank you, sir."

"And, as it is left to me, I will release them with the warning to keep clear of my path."

"You can go, men, and heed my warning if you love life!"

The prisoners were as much amazed as was the Vigilante captain, as Dick Dunwoody set them free, and they lost no time in getting out of sight, while the young miner told his friends of his double streak of luck, and by midnight was known through Golden Gulch as "The Wizard Miner."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WIZARD MINER'S PLOT.

THAT the sudden bursting open of the huge trunk, upon the top of the stage-coach, and the appearance of a man standing up in it, armed with a lariat, was an intense surprise to Monk Harris, as well as to Queen Helen of the Overland, was very evident.

When Monk Harris said that he had no passengers he believed that he was telling the truth, for he knew nothing whatever of the plot to surprise Queen Helen, that having been concocted in the brain of Dick Dunwoody, the Wizard Miner, and successfully carried out with the aid of the head-man of the Gold Brick stables.

When the stage was run out of the shed, the baggage was on, and no one suspected that the big trunk held a human being.

The lariat had been passed through a hole and made fast to the cleats on the stage-coach top, and the coil was held in the hand of Dick Dunwoody, ready for use.

Through holes in the trunk he had both seen and heard all that transpired between Monk Harris and Queen Helen, and just at the right time had thrown up the lid, and sent his lariat whirling through the air.

He was no man to fire upon a woman, and his intention had been to catch her, the coil pinioning her arms down to her side, and thus preventing the use of her pistols.

With her in his power, he felt by threats of killing her if attacked, to keep the band at bay, should they be there, and thus successfully bear off his prize.

He had been prompted to do this from his friendly regard for Horace Hammond and Ruby, for he saw that the young wife was really greatly worried at the threats of the outlaw queen, who he did not doubt would do all in her power to keep her vow of revenge.

"I'll see that the woman goes to prison, and that will cut short her career of crime; but no one at Golden Gulch shall do her bodily harm, if she is an outlaw," he had said to himself.

His plot was successful up to the catching of the woman, for though she had wheeled her horse quickly and bent low in the saddle, the coil settled around her, and pinioned her arms to her side, as the miner had intended.

But the lid of the trunk was thrown back with such force that it broke off, fell upon the stage top with a bang, and then to the rocky trail with a crash that made the horses bound forward upon the jump.

To check them, Monk Harris, who saw the danger to the woman, placed his foot so heavily upon the brake that it snapped off with a report

like a pistol, and he had only his reins to depend upon, and he tugged manfully at them.

But Queen Helen had also seen her danger, and with wonderful presence of mind, as soon as the lariat became taut, urged her horse close behind the coach.

Having caught his game, Dick Dunwoody was most unwilling to lose it, but had intended severing the lariat, to prevent the woman's being dragged from her saddle, and then along the rocky road to death.

But her prompt act gave him a chance to hold her, and he drew in on the lariat as she urged her horse behind the stage, and thus kept her arms still held close to her side.

"Villain, release me!" commanded the woman, her face pale with rage, as she rushed along behind the swaying, flying stage.

Dick Dunwoody had stepped out of the trunk, and was seated on the top of the stage, his legs hanging over behind, his hands tightly grasping the lariat, while Monk Harris was trying all in his power to keep his flying team in the trail, for one glance behind was sufficient to show him that he did not care to check their speed.

And that glance discovered the ten horsemen of the outlaw queen's band coming on at full speed in chase.

In answer to the demand of Queen Helen, the young miner said:

"Oh no, my beauty, for your horse keeps pace well with the stage, and there is no danger of you being dragged from your saddle, while your men dare not fire, for fear of killing you, and if they come nearer I will pick them off one by one, as you shall see."

"The lariat cuts into my flesh, and my horse may bolt from the trail at any time and kill me," said the woman.

"If you were a man the lariat should cut that pretty throat of yours, and if your horse bolts the trail and kills you, Queen Helen, then you will be saved a life-long misery in prison."

"Release me, sir, or I shall throw myself from the saddle!" fiercely cried the woman.

"Do so, Queen Helen, and I'll drag you to the top of this coach as I would land a fish on a line," was the cool reply.

"Let her go, pard, for God's sake, as I dare not round yonder bend at full speed," suddenly shouted Monk Harris.

The young miner glanced ahead and saw the truth of the driver's words, and that he had not an instant to lose.

Quickly he drew his knife, and severing the lariat, called out:

"Go, my beauty! but remember, we shall meet again."

"Ay, shall we, my gallant fellow, and mine will be the triumph," shouted back the woman.

As the strain upon the lariat was loosened, she released her arms and drew her horse to a halt, to await the coming of her band, while the stage-coach shot on out of her sight around a craggy wall that overhung the roadway, and where the trail was very narrow, and the other side a precipice over which Monk Harris felt that the vehicle and team would be hurled, did he keep up his former rate of speed.

But, with the strength of desperation he drew on his lines, and checked the flying team, bringing them down to half their former pace ere he reached the dangerous curve.

As it was, the hind wheels slipped dangerously near the edge of the precipice, and Dick Dunwoody, who was preparing to go to the aid of Monk Harris, stood poised himself in doubt upon the top of the coach, for an instant fearing that there was no hope.

But the wheels ceased slipping at last, and within a foot of the fearful edge, and the young miner shouted out, as he saw Monk Harris cast a quick glance behind him:

"Bravo! Harris! a miss is as good as a mile!"

"Look! fer God's sake, pard!"

The words came in a shriek from the lips of Monk Harris, and his gaze was upward, at the edge of the cedar-covered crag that overhung the road, and which was then directly above the stage-coach.

In spite of his nerve Dick Dunwoody started at the alarmed cry of the driver, and was turning his gaze upward, when over his head and shoulders settled a lariat, and, tightening with a loud twang as the coach dashed on, he was left dangling in mid-air.

"Holy smoke! but he are hanged, an' thar comes Queen Helen an' her outlaws in full chase," cried Monk Harris, as he glanced over his shoulder, and beheld the wildly swinging form of the young miner, and turning around the curve Queen Helen and her band of marauders.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STAGE DRIVER'S STORY.

THE reader will remember that upon the arrival of the stage which brought the mysterious veiled woman and the young miner, Dick Dunwoody, there was one person who had been taken to a room in the hotel, supposed to be seriously wounded.

He had been shot in the neck, in the fight with the road-agents, and it was supposed that he was mortally wounded.

But Frank Powell, after extracting the bullet, saw that the wound was not a severe one, the loss of blood having been the most serious, as it weakened the man greatly.

The stranger had given his name as Henry Hart, and had so been registered upon the books of the Gold Brick, with the additional information that he was a gambler.

The room of the stranger was in a rear wing of the hotel, away from all noise, he having so requested it the day after his arrival, and he had asked that a nurse might be engaged to look after him, offering to pay liberally for such service.

Doctor Powell had volunteered to look him up some one, but the wounded man said that he knew of a person whom he had last heard of as being in Golden Gulch, and if he could be found, he would be the very one for the work, as he had once been a nurse in a hospital.

"What is his name, Mr. Hart?" asked Frank Powell.

"His name is Tim Lucas, but we called him Whalebone, as he was such a wiry, agile little fellow."

"A black-eyed fellow of twenty-four or five, with a waist as small as a woman!"

"Yes, doctor."

"There is such a man here, and we call him Jockey, as he rides all of the races."

"But I have also heard him called Tim."

"It must be one and the same, and it would be a great kindness if you would look him up for me."

"I will at once call the man to whom I refer, for he was in the bar as I came up."

Leaving the room Frank Powell was absent a few minutes and returned, accompanied by a young man with a cunning, bright face, black, fearless eyes, and a form that was slender and graceful.

"Tim Lucas as I live!" cried the wounded man upon beholding him.

"Why, pard, I am delighted to see you," cried Jockey Tim, grasping the hand of the wounded man, while he added:

"I had no idee it was an old friend that was wounded."

"Yes, and I had a close call, Tim, but the doctor says I am pulling through all right."

"Are you doing anything?"

"Digging a little, pard, and gambling when I have dust."

"Then look after me until I get better and I'll pay you well for it."

"It's a go," and Jockey Tim was at once installed as nurse, and a good one he seemed to make too.

Finding that he was little needed Frank Powell made but one visit a day to the wounded man, for the few following his arrival, and then was in his room but a short while.

And yet he gave orders that no one in the hotel was to be admitted to see the wounded man, which seemed a contradiction to his assertion that his patient was not seriously hurt.

Upon the afternoon of the day on which Dick Dunwoody had attempted to capture Queen Helen in such a bold manner, Frank Powell was seated upon the piazza of the Gold Brick, enjoying a cigar after dinner.

He had made his round of professional visits during the morning, and as Horace Hammond, Faro Fred and Colonel Roland were at the mines, and Dick Dunwoody off on the execution of his daring plot, he was alone, and was buried in deep reverie.

Suddenly the winding of the stage-horn startled him and aroused Golden Gulch into activity at once.

Major Simon Suggs came out from his room, where he had been enjoying a *siesta*, the pretty faces of Ruby Hammond and Fanchita Fairbanks appeared at the sitting-room window, and a score of idlers gathered in front of the Gold Brick to hear the news, for the coming of the stage was a daily event of importance in Golden Gulch.

With a flourish and the air of a man who had something of importance to tell, Hank Talbot, the bosom pard of Monk Harris, drew up at the door of the Gold Brick.

"Any pilgrims, Hank?" asked a miner, seeing no face at the coach window.

"Nary, fer pilgrims is as skeerce as hens' teeth now, an' I doesn't wonder."

"What is the news, Hank?" asked Doctor Powell, who saw that Hank Talbot wished to be questioned.

"News enough, Doc."

"Out with it then."

"Yer know thar is road-agents on foot?"

"Yes, and horseback, too."

"Yes, Doc, so thar is."

"Did they halt you, Hank?"

"No, Doc."

"Then what do you know about 'em?"

"I has seen Monk."

"Hai! was he stopped again by Queen Helen?"

"For a fact he were, Doc."

"And robbed?"

"Nary, but he had a lively time o' it."

"Tell us, Hank; what has happened?"

"Yer knows thar is gay young pilgrim as made it so lively fer the road-agents, t'other day?"

"Dick Dunwoody, you mean?"

"Yas."

"What of him?"

"Has you seen him around ter-day?"

"No; he went to his new mine this morning."

"Guess not, Doc."

"Hank Talbot, you are as tedious as a balky horse."

"Quick, tell us what of the Wizard Miner, as the boys call Dunwoody now."

"Did yer see a big trunk go out on Monk's coach this morning?"

An exclamation from the window of the sitting-room showed that both Ruby and Fanchita were overcome with curiosity to know what had happened, and were looking daggers at the tiresome stage-driver.

"How do, leddies?"

"I hopes yer is well ter-day," said Hank, coolly, raising his broad-brimmed hat at seeing them.

They bowed, and Ruby said, frankly:

"No; we are dying with curiosity to know what you have to tell, Mr. Talbot."

"Oh, yes, leddies: I has always heerd wimmins was cur'ous-minded by natur', an' I guesses it are so."

"Hank Talbot, I intend to go to the bar and take a drink in just five minutes, and if you expect to join me, finish your story in that time."

"I'll do it, Doc, you bet."

"Waal!" and thus put on time Hank Talbot spoke rapidly:

"Yer see I metted Monk this noon an' his hosses looked beat out, an' he didn't seem happy."

"He were a little t'other side o' our gin'ral meetin'-place, an' I seen he hed had a lively scrimmage o' some kind, so come to a halt ter pass the time o' day like."

"Then he telled me thar hed been Old Nick ter pay, fer he hed met ther outlaw queen, give her ther letter Kid Gloves hed sent her, an' all o' a suddint ther trunk on ther top o' his old hearse burst open an' up jumped ther wild miner."

"Ha! Dick Dunwoody?"

"Thet same, Pard Doc."

"He hed, says Monk, a lariat in his hand, an' he slung it so true he cotched ther queen jist as ther trunk-top fell to ther yarth with a bang that skeert ther hosses an' made 'em sail off, fer my pard said ther brake snapped an' he c'u'dn't stop 'em."

"But Queen Helen, Hank, what of her?"

"Yes, what of the woman?"

"Did he lariat her?"

"Did he catch her?"

"Are she dead, Hank?"

"Are she bagged, pard?"

"Pard, tell us—"

"Shet up fer ther love o' God!" roared Hank Talbot, flourishing his whip and commanding instant silence.

"How in thunder are I ter take that drink with Doc in five blessid minutes when you all does ther talkin'?"

"Doc, you axed me about ther woman?"

"Yes."

"Waal, thet wild Dunwoody lariated her fer sartin."

"But she called to her horse an' he ran on arter ther stage, so she didn't git dragged off, an' ther young miner he pulled onter ther lariat an' kept her arms tight down ter her side."

"Thus they sailed ter ther front, while ahint them came the road-agents in chase."

"Ther Wizard Miner, as yer calls him, kept 'em out o' range with his revolvers, an' they was afeerd ter shoot, on account o' hittin' ther queen."

"So they sailed on until they come ter ther Devil's Walk, an' Monk know'd he c'u'dn't tarn it at full speed, so he called out ter ther miner ter let ther gal go an' help him drag ther hosses up."

"Ther miner cuts ther lariat with his knife, shouts out suthin' at ther woman, an' was a-goin' ter help Monk, when over ther cliff came a lariat, droppin' squar' upon ther shoulders o' Dunwoody, an' he war jerked clean off ther coach an' left swingin' in ther air."

"Great God! was he hanged?" cried Frank Powell.

"I give it up, Doc."

"Monk says he saw him swingin' thar, as he went on, an' ther road-agents ridin' straight fer him."

"Monk, as yer knows, hain't got no coward blood in him; but he says he didn't bev ther narve ter draw up his critters when he seen that, so let 'em run on."

"He didn't know ther miner were in ther trunk, an' were took considible aback when he seen him bu'st up as he did."

"He says it were ther gamest thing he ever see, an' I guesses as how it were, an' I does hope thar no harm bev come to ther young pilgrim, tho' it do look cloudy like."

"Pard Doc, hev them five minutes occurred yit, fer talkin'?"

"Yes, Hank, you have won your drink; but it is sad news you bring, and I, for one, say, ho to the rescue of the Wizard Miner."

"Who are with me, boys?"

A score of voices answered in the affirmative,

just as Horace Hammond, the colonel and Faro Fred rode up to the hotel.

Hearing the news they at once volunteered for the ride to rescue the Wizard Miner, and Frank Powell said:

"Hammond, you organize the party, and we will get off as soon as all are ready."

"As for myself I have a duty to perform before we start," and the doctor went up-stairs to his room.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOLF IN THE FOLD.

UPON going to his room Frank Powell made hasty preparations for his ride, and then went to the rear wing of the hotel, where were the quarters of the wounded gambler.

At his knock he was bid enter, and he found the bed of the wounded man drawn up in front of the open window, from which a wide view of valley and mountain could be obtained.

Henry Hart lay upon the bed, his neck bandaged, and his eyes fixed upon the distant mountains, while Jockey Tim sat by the window apparently in meditation.

"Well, doctor, this is an unexpected pleasure, for I had not looked for two visits from you today," said Henry Hart.

"I am going off on a little trip, Mr. Hart, and I came to have a little chat with you before leaving," was the quiet response.

"Indeed! what will the lame, halt and blind of Golden Gulch do without you, doctor, if you leave them?"

"Oh! they will get along all right."

"But are you enjoying the fine view from your window, Mr. Hart?"

"Yes, is it not grand?"

"It is indeed."

"I had this room once, and I have sat there at the window and watched the stage wind in and out on the trail as it came toward the gulch."

"Ah! could you see it so far?"

"Yes. Do you see yonder bold crag?"

"I do."

"The road runs beneath that; and, by the way, there was a strange scene happened on the Overland to-day."

"Indeed! What was it, pray?"

"I will tell you what occurred, as I heard it from Hank Harris," and Frank Powell went on to tell the story of the bold plot of the Wizard Miner to capture Queen Helen, and the result.

"I do hope that the daring fellow was not killed, doctor," earnestly said Henry Hart.

"Pardon me, Mr. Hart, but I believe you hope just to the contrary," was the cool reply of Frank Powell.

"What! do you mean that I lie?" sternly asked the wounded man.

"Yes; that is just what I mean, sir."

"Doctor Powell, I do not understand you, sir."

"I will make myself understood, Mr. Hart, I hope, when I tell you flatly that you are an imposter."

"Sir! Do you mean to insinuate that—"

"I insinuate nothing, sir, but I boldly assert that you are other than you seem— Hold! lie just where you are and keep calm, for excitement may reopen your wound, and I do not care to have to stay here to prevent your bleeding to death."

"On the contrary, sir, I shall not bleed to death, but I will soon be well enough to face you and demand an explanation of your words."

"For the present I can only say that I need your services no longer, and I demand your bill and will settle it now."

"My bill, Mr. Hart, is nothing, my services to you having been freely given from the first; and more, I shall give you some advice, and make no charge for that either."

Then turning to Jockey Tim, who had risen to his feet and looked on with strange interest, Frank Powell continued:

"Tim, do you know this man?"

"Yes, Doc."

"Who is he?"

"Mr. Henry Hart."

"What do you know him to be?"

"A gambler."

"And you know nothing else about him?"

"Only that he is a square man, Doc, for so I have ever found him."

"And where did you know him, Tim?"

"Back at Leavenworth," said Tim, with some hesitation.

Frank Powell looked squarely into the eyes of Jockey Tim, and said sternly:

"Whether you lie or not I do not know, but I give you the benefit of the doubt, as I have never heard anything bad against

half sprung from his bed at the bold accusation, while he stretched forth his hand to grasp his revolver, which hung near.

"Drop that, Black Bill, or I will kill you!" came sternly from the lips of the doctor.

With an oath the man obeyed, and Frank Powell continued:

"William Blackstone, alias Black Bill, alias Henry Hart, I know that face of yours: ay, before I had looked upon you twice I knew you, in spite of your having cut off your long black beard and hair.

"For an act that you did, which showed you were not wholly bad, Horace Hammond and myself spared your life, and bade you go free with two others.

"One of those others was Pathfinder, whom Dick Dunwoody killed in the mountains several days ago, and whom you must have recognized as the leader of the road-agents.

"Another was Helen Weldon, the sister of Blonde Bill, and she is now known as Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.

"Boldly she came here, and escaped.

"As boldly you have come, and I ask you why you are here, when death was to be the penalty if you ever visited this region again?"

"Powell, further disguise is useless, and I tell you frankly that I came here for no harm, but to try to live near the one whom I once served, and to, through her presence, lead a different life."

"And you began your reform by gambling as your profession?"

"I had no other means of support, Powell."

"And gambling so ruined you that you lost your mine by it, your honor, and became the veriest vagabond and outlaw."

"But, Powell—"

"Silence, sir, and hear me.

"That one, whom I admit you served, and well, is now the wife of a man whom you hate."

"Yet I love her, and—"

"Your love is an insult to Ruby Hammond: but, for the sake of the service you once did her, I again spare you, Black Bill, and will permit you to go in peace.

"But remember, if you darken Golden Gulch again with your presence, I will know you, come in what disguise you may, and I will hand you over to the Vigilantes."

"You are hard on a man who wishes to bury the past, Powell."

"Bah! I do not believe in your repentance, Black Bill.

"There were three of you spared that day.

"One of them, Pathfinder, was killed in deviltry only the other day, another, Helen Weldon, is now an outlaw queen, and you, Black Bill, have broken faith, and I find you here, and I fear for some sinister purpose.

"Now, Hank Talbot's stage goes out in the morning, and you are to go in it, for you are well enough to travel.

"If you do not, I will turn you over to the Vigilantes, and the same fate will be yours if you are ever seen in this region again.

"I give you this advice gratis, Black Bill, and warn you not to let Hank's stage leave without you."

Black Bill made no reply, and Frank Powell turned away, when Jockey Tim said:

"Waal, pard, I guess I'll sell you out to the Viges myself."

"Hold, sir! I have given this man my protection, and if you dare to betray him, you will have me to settle with," and Frank Powell turned upon Jockey Tim with flabbergasted eyes.

"All right, Doc, just as you say; but you sends him off, and I lose a job, and I'm poor."

"Then I will give you work in looking after my traps and my horses.

"Now get Black Bill ready for his trip tomorrow, and if he is recognized I will know whom to call to answer for it."

Without another word the doctor strode from the room, and soon after rode away from the Gold Brick at the head of thirty gallant horsemen, all anxious to go upon the trail of Queen Helen and her band.

CHAPTER XVII.

QUEEN HELEN'S PRIZE.

By rapid riding the Regulators, as the band of rescuers called themselves, arrived before dark in the mountains, at the scene where the road-agents had been in the habit of halting the Overland stages.

They at once sped through the narrow canyon known as Queen Helen's Toll-Gate, and began a thorough search of the surroundings.

But darkness at last came on, and the party met at a given point without having made other discovery than that there were a number of trails leading back into the deeper recesses of the mountains.

Going into camp the Regulators built no fires, ate their supper in darkness, and then sought rest upon their blankets to await the coming of dawn.

No guards were set, for they were too many in number to fear an attack from the small band of the robber queen, and the night passed away without an alarm.

With the break of day they were awake, and

hastily disposing of breakfast, they mounted and rode on along the trail where Monk Harris's team had gone flying the day before, Queen Helen in the coil of Dick Dunwoody's lariat.

Here and there were marks where the stage wheels had scraped around a curve, and many remarks complimentary to the driving of Monk Harris, who had kept his runaway team in the trail and his lumbering coach upright under the dangerous circumstances attending its flight.

At last the ledge around the cliff came in sight, and instantly those along began to comment upon the fearful danger of going around the curve faster than a walk.

"Pards, I'd hev lit out hed I been a pilgrim in ther hearse," said one.

"Yas, I'd. hev never sot still an' been driv' around the tarn," remarked another.

"Pards, how Monk ever made it are ther wonder."

"But he did make it."

"You bet; but look whar ther wheel滑了."

Such were the remarks that were heard as they reached the dangerous ledge, with a cliff above it and a cliff below it, a shelf of rock, as it were, leading around the precipice.

Above them was the craggy wall, its top covered with cedars, and from there the lariat had been thrown that had so cleverly caught Dick Dunwoody.

They picked out the very cedar to which one end of the lariat must have been fastened, but no sign of the tragedy they all feared had been enacted there could be seen.

"How far is it to a place where we can get upon that ridge?" asked Frank Powell.

No one answered, and Horace Hammond said:

"Do none of you know?"

It seemed that no one knew that trail very well, so the party scattered to make a thorough search for a vulnerable part of the rocky wall from which an ascent could be made.

But no opening presented itself, look as they might, and thus several hours passed in the search.

"Hark!" cried the doctor, as they all assembled once more beneath the crag, ready to start upon a long flank movement of the ridge, for all knew, to get a trace of what had become of Dick Dunwoody they must reach the point from whence the lariat had been launched upon him.

In dead silence they listened, and soon the sound that Powell had heard reached every ear.

"It is the stage-coach," cried Horace Hammond.

"Yes, and bravo for Monk Harris, who had dared come back after yesterday's affair, for he must feel that the outlaws suspected him of putting Dunwoody up to his bold plot," said Faro Fred.

Just then around the curve came the heads of the leaders, and next the stage appeared in sight.

They saw Monk on the box, and his sudden pull upon the reins as he caught sight of them, while he called out:

"Hello, pards! I took yer fer road-agents, as sure as shootin'!"

"No, Monk, we are hunting road-agents, and trying to find some clew to poor Dunwoody."

"Doc, thar is whar I seen him last, about on a level with my box, an' some durned ugly pictur's lookin' down onto him frum up yonder, while Queen Helen an' her gang was a-cumin' along ther trail fer all they was worth."

"But I hev precious freight ter-day in ther old hearse," and Monk Harris motioned with his whip at the stage.

"Ahl what is it, Monk?" asked Horace Hammond, riding forward.

"Somebody as is lookin' fer you, pard," answered Monk.

Just then a beautiful young face, with red-gold hair, dark blue eyes, and pouting lips appeared in the stage window.

"Ruth Elgin!" cried Horace Hammond in a tone of joyful surprise.

"Ah, Mr. Hammond, is that you?" came the answer in the sweetest voice imaginable.

"Yes, Ruth, and happy am I to see you, and a glad welcome will Ruby give you."

"But we did not expect you for a month yet."

"I know; but school closed on account of an epidemic breaking out in the town, and so I started at once, and I have heard so much of road-agents the past two days, I at once set you and your party down as robbers," and the young girl laughed merrily.

"No, we are not as bad as that; but you must go on, and Ruby will take care of you in my absence."

"Come, Monk, you have indeed precious freight this trip, though I do not think you need fear Queen Helen and her band with us in the mountains."

"No, I guesses I goes through all right this time, pards."

"Good-by, an' I hopes yer'll hang ther hul gang," and with a crack of his whip Monk Harris sent his team along once more toward Golden Gulch.

But, as he reached the end of the canyon, and when he held no dread of danger, sharp and threatening rung out the words:

"Monk Harris, halt!"

"Dum nation! it are the queen, an' ther boys hain't half a mile away," cried the driver.

"Throw up your hands!" came the next order.

"Up they goes," and as Monk Harris raised them above his head Queen Helen rode into view, and at her back were her ten horsemen.

"Ah! you have a fair passenger I see," said the woman, glancing into the coach.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I am one who am ashamed to see a woman so fallen as to have become an outlaw," was the spirited reply of the young girl.

"Bones o' my granddad! but yer got it that time, Queen Helen," cried Monk, and the woman flushed, while she continued:

"Ah! now I know you.

"Are you not Ruth Elgin?"

"I am."

"Monk Harris, I will take charge of your passenger as my special prize.

"Drive on and tell Horace Hammond that I now strike my second blow at him.

"Will you come willingly, girl, or shall my men seize you?"

"I will come willingly if I must," was the low reply.

The poor girl arose, as one of Queen Helen's outlaws threw open the door, and placed her foot upon the step.

But then her head reeled, she clutched at the air and fell into the arms of the outlaw in a deep swoon.

"Oh! cuss you, woman, for all my cuss is with!

"But ther day o' jedgment fer you will git round yit," cried Monk Harris, savagely.

"Drive on!" and the revolver of the woman covered the head of the brave man.

In silence he obeyed, and looking backward, as he went down the trail, he saw Queen Helen and her men ride back up the canyon, carrying with them their prize.

Drawing rein he switched out a revolver and began to fire it rapidly as an alarm to the Regulators.

Instantly several of the outlaws were seen to wheel their horses and start in chase of him.

"Git, you devils!" shouted Monk Harris, and like the very wind he sent his team flying down the rough trail toward Golden Gulch, while he emptied another revolver in hope that its reports would reach the ears of those who were then hunting for Queen Helen and her band.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TRIO OF TRAILERS.

THE pistol-shots fired by Monk Harris were heard by the Regulators, who were moving on around the ridge to where they knew a break occurred in it some miles distant.

The wind was blowing down the valley and the sound of the firing was wafted to their ears.

"Quick! to the right-about, men, for Monk Harris needs our aid!" cried Frank Powell, and instantly the party wheeled their horses and started back on the trail at a sweeping gallop.

The four men in the lead were well known to the reader, for they were the doctor, the colonel, Faro Fred and Horace Hammond, and each one had his separate squad of six men, so that they could divide in the search.

Back over the road they went, and again was heard for the second time the rattle of Monk's revolver.

"Press on, men!" shouted Colonel Boland, and the spurs were driven into the sides of their horses.

Soon they reached the canyon, dashed through it, and then came in sight of the stage a mile below, going down the mountain road at break-neck speed, and with four horsemen dressed in black in close pursuit.

Instantly Frank Powell called out:

"There is some secret opening in these cliffs through which they have come out into the trail, and we must find it."

"You, Hammond, dash on with your squad in chase of those fellows, while you, Fred, return the way we came and try and gain yonder ridge by a flank movement."

"Colonel Roland, your party and mine will search every foot of this mountain side and canyon for their secret retreat."

Away rode Horace Hammond and his men without a word, in hot chase of the four bandits after the stage, while Faro Fred and his party went back on the way they had been going when alarmed by the shouts of Monk Harris.

Then Frank Powell and the colonel set to work with their men to find the secret channel, from which they knew the outlaws must emerge from the mountains upon the trail, for how else could they get there in such a mysterious manner.

All day long the search continued, and without result in favor of the outlaw-hunters, for not the slightest trace of a trail, or secret inlet to the mountains could be found, though Lanky, a hunter of acknowledged superiority as a trailer, examined most closely every foot of ground upon the mountainous wall of rock.

Back to join the searchers in their work then came Horace Hammond and his men, and they looked worn and anxious.

"Well, Hammond, they escaped you!" said

Frank Powell, and all gathered around to hear what the answer would be.

"Yes, and worse, that devilish woman captured poor little Ruth Elgin," he said sadly.

"Captured her?"

"Yes, Powell."

"That lovely girl who had come West to join you?"

"Yes, for her brother being dead, and she having no one to look to, we wrote to her to come to us as soon as she had completed her studies, and the result is that Helen Weldon has her in her power."

"She must be wrested from it at all hazards, if every man in Golden Gulch turns out for the hunt."

"No, Powell, that would do no good, and if cornered, that woman would save herself by threatening harm to poor Ruth."

"There is but one way to find her and rescue her."

"And that is, Hammond?"

"To come alone."

"Ah! you are right, for you mean to still-hunt the band as you did Blonde Bill?"

"Yes."

"I am with you, Hammond."

"I know it, Powell."

"And I," said Faro Fred, who had ridden up with his men.

"No, Fred, two are sufficient, and Powell's offer I will accept."

"You saw Monk Harris, then?"

"Yes, we overhauled the coach, for Monk drew rein as soon as his pursuers disappeared."

"Where they went to was the mystery, for we spent hours searching for them, and their means of escape."

"Harris said the woman recognized Ruth, and took her with her, sending me word that she had struck her second blow at me in kidnapping the poor girl."

"I told Monk not to speak of the affair in the Gulch; but we might as well now all go back, for their spies are evidently watching us, and then you and I, Powell, can start back to-night."

"It is the best plan; but Fred, did you find no break in the mountain?"

"No, Doc, not for miles, for all along the same steep wall of rock was presented, and it would take a whole day, Lanky says, to reach the top of yonder ridge, which is not a quarter of a mile distant in a straight line."

"Hoping that you had made some discovery, I turned back."

"Well, all we can do is to return to the Gulch, and leave the outlaws to laugh at our defeat."

"But the laugh may be upon our side yet," said Frank Powell, and mounting their horses, just as the sun was setting, the party of Regulators set out for Golden Gulch with faces made gloomy by their failure and the unknown fate of Ruth Elgin and the young Wizard Miner.

Silently they filed into Golden Gulch, and a hush seemed to fall upon the town, and those assembled in the Gold Brick bar talked in lower tones, for the mystery attending the actions of Queen Helen and her sable-clad crew, impressed all, especially the more superstitious of the miners.

But, just at midnight three men rode away from the Gold Brick Hotel, and their destination was the mountains where the outlaws had their retreat.

Those three were Horace Hammond, Frank Powell and Lanky, and a trio of better trailers never struck a trail.

CHAPTER XIX.

QUEEN HELEN MYSTIFIED.

I WILL now return to the gallant young miner whose daring attempt to capture Queen Helen had gotten him caught in a trap, as bad as was that which he had set for her, and one that had in it more deadly peril, as a woman's life would be spared, where a man would be sacrificed.

The sudden dropping of the lariat coil over his head was certainly a great surprise to him, and he was switched off of his feet before he hardly realized what had happened.

But Dick Dunwoody was a man of great presence of mind under all circumstances, and realizing that the coil about him would hang him, as quick as the flash of a thought he had thrust up his bent arm, and thus saved his neck from the fatal noose.

As the stage dashed on and left him suspended there, he glanced upward and saw that the lariat came over the ledge of rock above, and that the end was fastened to the trunk of a pine tree, the foliage of which he could see, he was confident.

But not a face peering over did he see, nor did he hear the sound of a human voice.

The stage dashed on and disappeared from sight, and the clatter of hoofs reached his ears, and he beheld the road-agents coming on at a run, with Queen Helen at their head.

To remain suspended there, and show signs of life, would be but to become a target for their bullets, for he felt that Queen Helen's temper was at white heat after his capture of her.

Instantly he determined upon his course, and that was to play dead.

Slipping his arm out of the noose, he let it tighten about his neck, but took good care to have the slip-knot under his throat.

Then he held his head back, and by the sheer muscular strength of the neck kept the rope from tightening, his chin held hard against the knot.

Dropping his hands to his side, he hung there limp and apparently lifeless.

Then up dashed the outlaws, and drew rein beneath him, Queen Helen commanding:

"Hold! let the stage go, for this man is the Wizard Miner, and he is my game."

"But who has done this deed?"

Not one of her band could answer.

"It is the work of some one who stood upon yonder ledge, and who was frightened off by our coming," continued Queen Helen.

"They have done their work well, Queen Helen," said one of the band.

"Yes, and thus cut me off from my revenge, for he is dead; but who can have done it?"

"Perhaps it was the gang who attacked the coach several days ago, when you were in it," said a member of the band.

"Hal! you strike the right chord, Carlos, for it could have been none other."

"Come, we will go round by the secret passage to the ridge yonder and hunt up those fellows, for these mountains are not large enough for other band than mine," she said sternly.

"Will I cut him down, queen?" asked one.

"How?"

"By a pistol-shot."

"No, for we can draw him up on the ledge when we get there."

"I feared some one might come along."

"No danger, for Monk Harris is the only man that has the pluck to drive this road now, and he is on the eastward trip and will not come back until to-morrow."

"The other stage is due here in a few hours."

"True, and Hank Talbot is the driver, and is a good one. But we can reach the ridge before he comes along. Come, let us go!"

The men fell into single file behind their beautiful but wicked leader, and she led them back on the trail to the narrow canyon.

Through the canyon the trail was too cut up with tracks to make any particular sign, but, when they reached the ravine running into the canyon each horseman took a roll from the back of his saddle, which, when opened proved to be two pads of tarred cloth, seven feet long by three in width, and which looked as though intended to serve as beds upon the ground when in camp.

In fact they did serve for this purpose and one other too.

What that other purpose was, was at once revealed, for the pads were laid end for end in a row, forming a track over which the outlaws led their horses so that not the slightest trail was left behind.

Was one man alone his two pads would enable him to retreat in the same manner, leading his horse from one to the other.

For the distance of several hundred yards this way of retreat was kept up and then their way was barred by a wall of rock sixty feet in height.

Going to a tree that grew some paces away one of the outlaws at once climbed up it, and took from a hiding-place around its foliage a long rope in which were tied knots every yard apart, and to the end of which was fastened a hook of iron, something like a grapnel.

Stepping off to one side of the cliff, he began to whirl the hook around his head in large circles, and then cast it with such skill that it went over the top of the cliff.

Drawing hard upon it he found that it had caught fast, and rapidly he ascended to the top, followed by a companion.

A minute only were they out of sight over the cliff-top, when a derrick, upholding a wooden frame, large enough to hold a horse, appeared over the edge, and was lowered to the gulch below.

Queen Helen and several of her men at once got into the stall, or crate, and were drawn to the top, and back again it was lowered for the animals.

Once upon the cliff the clever scheme for escape and mystification was revealed, for in the edge of a cedar thicket the machinery for raising and lowering the outlaws was visible.

It was rudely constructed, but strong, easily handled, and answered the purpose most thoroughly.

"Carlos, I wish a man kept here constantly now, so that there will be no delay in escaping, should we be pressed, and another of the band must be stationed at the foot-bridge on the trail below," said the outlaw queen.

"It shall be as you say, queen," answered Carlos.

"Eight men will be ample for me to work with on the trail, and we must not run risks that will injure us."

"Leave Bony here, send Hark to the bridge, and you come on after me with the other men,

for we must reach the ledge before Hank Talbot's stage goes by."

So saying, he rode on alone, but was soon followed by Carlos and his seven remaining horsemen.

A ride along the mountainous ridge, and which was a dangerous and rough trail to follow, brought them, after several miles, to the ledge where they had left the dead body, as they believed, of the Wizard Miner hanging.

But dismounting and approaching the ledge, Queen Helen uttered a startled cry, for no hanging body was visible.

There was the spot, certainly, and beneath her ran the road.

The tree was there to which the lariat had been made fast, for the mark of the rope was about the trunk.

But the man and the lariat, and those who had caught him so cleverly, were nowhere visible.

Instantly a thorough search was instituted, but without other result than the finding of some red spots upon the rocks, which all knew to be blood.

What other tragedy had been enacted there, not one of the outlaws could guess.

But certain it was that Queen Helen had rivals, perhaps foes, in these mountains, and her first duty was to hunt them down.

"Men, there were men here, and they are still in these mountains, and must be found.

"Remember, upon their capture depends our safety," said the outlaw Amazon, and the band at once set to work to find their foes.

CHAPTER XX.

DICK DUNWOODY'S DANGER.

No one who saw Dick Dunwoody, the Wizard Miner, swinging from the ledge as he did, would have doubted for an instant that he was dead.

The road-agents, as they dashed along the trail, from a distant point had beheld him caught by the lariat and jerked from the stage top.

Then, the winding of the road shut him from their view, and when they next appeared he hung there like one dead.

They had not seen the little act of the miner to save his life, or knew the strain to which he was put to prevent being choked to death.

Hanging there as he did, in the full possession of all his faculties, he heard all that was said.

And hearing, it certainly was no pleasant thing for him to listen to the suggestion of one of the band to drop him to the ground by a pistol-shot.

Standing up as he had been upon the high stage-coach, his feet hung within reach almost of the outlaws, yet not one had attempted to touch them, for all murderers are superstitious about touching the dead, though they do not feel hesitancy in killing.

As soon as the band disappeared up the trail, Dick Dunwoody reached up and grasping the lariat raised himself to a position to rest his neck after the strain upon it.

Then he rapidly ascended the lariat, hand over hand, and sprung upon the ledge.

Not a human being was in sight, and yet he knew that some one must be near, so he took refuge behind a scrub cedar that grew near, and patiently waited.

"They were evidently alarmed by the appearance of the outlaws, and feared that they might use me as a rope to ascend by, so retreated.

"But they will return," said Dunwoody to himself.

He had not very long to wait before he saw a man peer above a distant boulder and glance earnestly toward the ledge.

As if satisfied that the road-agents had not come upon the ledge, by the very novel way which had been afforded them, the man stepped from behind the boulder and was joined by two others of a like appearance, which appearance was by no means flattering, as they were certainly a villainous-looking crew.

"They are the remainder of the gang who attacked the coach the other day," muttered Dunwoody, showing no signs of nervousness whatever at being confronted by three men.

Cautiously the trio came toward the ledge, two of them with lariats banging about their shoulders, and the third without any, but all of them thoroughly armed.

"I know the fellow that caught me so nimble," muttered Dunwoody, glancing at the man who was without a lariat.

As they drew near the ledge they seemed to gain courage and one of them peeped over, the young miner turning as they approached so as to keep the tree between them and himself.

"Pards, they bev tuk him down," said the man who had thrown himself flat upon his face and peered over the ledge.

"Waal, they was a leetle late ter save him, ef they wanted ter even, fer that war a good throw o' youn, Tubby," said another.

"It wasn't so durned bad, war it, pards!

"But here are my lariat, an' I guesses we hed better git, fer them agints knows a way up here that we didn't come, an' they'll be lookin' fer us."

"Durn that Pathfinder, he got us inter a bad biz when he brought us here ter rob ther Overland coaches, an' I fer one, says let us skip back ter ther upper mines afore we gits strung up."

"I is o' your opinion, Mack, an' ther sooner we gits ther longer we will hev ter live."

This view of the case seemed to meet all favorably and they turned from the ledge to start back with a cry of horror, for in their path was what appeared to them to be an apparition, for it was the very person they had caught in the toils a quarter of an hour before and who had been believed to be dead.

"One moment, pard, if you please," said Dick Dunwoody, with his pleasant smile; but in each hand he held a revolver and each of the trio felt that he was certainly covered by one of the weapons.

Still, driven to desperation, they felt that they must make a bold fight for life, and, as they started back in alarm at the wholly unlooked-for presence before them, they dropped their hands with wonderful unanimity upon their revolvers and jerked them from their belts, and instantly the rattle of firearms followed.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OUTLAW QUEEN'S CAPTIVE.

WHEN Ruth Elgin recovered consciousness she was aware that she was being borne along upon horseback.

Her arms were tied tightly, and over her eyes was a bandage, so that she was helpless and in darkness.

For a moment she could not recall what had happened, but at last she became fully conscious of the scenes through which she had passed up to the time when she swooned away.

Now she felt that she was being supported upon a horse by some strong arm.

At first she hoped that she had been rescued, but that fond thought vanished as quick as born, for she knew that if such was the case she would neither be bound or blindfolded.

"Where am I?" she asked suddenly of the one who held her.

"You are on horseback," was his reply.

"That I know; but where?"

"In the mountains above Golden Gulch?"

"And who are you?"

"One of Queen Helen's outlaw band."

"Ah! then I am in that woman's power!"

"Yes, you are Queen Helen's captive."

"Where is she?"

"Just in advance of us."

"Take this handkerchief from my eyes that I may speak with her."

"Sball I do so, Queen Helen?" asked the man.

"Yes, for she can make no discovery now to our detriment," was the reply of the woman.

The bandage was instantly removed from over the beautiful eyes, and Ruth Elgin looked around her in amazement.

She was a beautiful girl, scarcely eighteen, and with a form of grace and elegance.

She was dressed in a traveling suit of dark gray, wore a stylish hat that was very becoming, and her helpless condition in the power of outlaws was enough to excite the pity of any heart not wholly hardened by crime.

She saw that she was held in front of a man who rode a large jet-black horse, and who was armed to the teeth.

He was dressed in black, and wore a mask which wholly concealed his face.

Behind him came in single file seven other horsemen, all mounted on black steeds and similarly attired to the one who held her.

Before her rode Queen Helen, sitting in her saddle like the superb horsewoman she was.

As Ruth gazed upon her she saw her boldly ride upon a swinging bridge, spanning a deep ravine, for the bottom, as the maiden gazed down from the dizzy height, was several hundred feet below.

The bridge was rudely made, had rope barriers only upon either side, and was not a yard in width.

It was made of raw-hide ropes, poles and stout cables, and was a bridge that few men would care to venture over upon horseback.

But, without hesitation Queen Helen led the way upon the frail structure, and Carlos, the man who held Ruth, boldly followed.

The bridge, under the tread of the horses swung to and fro, creaked loudly, and seemed as if about to snap in twain, and the maiden held her breath with suspense, and shut her eyes, that she might not see down into the fearful depths.

Once she opened her eyes, as a particularly wide swing of the structure caused her to believe that they were lost.

But she beheld Queen Helen calmly looking down into the ravine as she rode along, and the sight gave her courage.

But she gave a deep sigh of relief when the suspense was over and she heard the ring of the iron-shod hoofs upon *terra firma*.

A ride into the mountains further of half a mile and the outlaw camp was reached.

Nature had certainly done much for the situation, as it was approached by a narrow defile, and though but a plateau of a few acres, was

so rising by towering cliffs where it seemed only a bird could find a foothold.

A cabin, evidently newly built was upon a mossy bank, and a spring bubbled up before the door.

Then, under the cliff side were shanties for the men.

"Here is my home, Ruth Elgin, and you are to be my guest and prisoner until I shall decide what shall be your fate.

"If you attempt to escape my men will shoot you down as they would a dog, and I will send your body to Horace Hammond to show him that I dare kill a woman even if he did spare me."

Ruth gazed straight into the face of the beautiful fiend, and said with a shudder:

"Ah, woman! you are utterly bad, a living curse to your sex."

Queen Helen broke forth in a musical laugh, and, with no show of anger, said:

"This is my cabin, my mountain palace, and here you are to remain with me, until it is decided what your fate is to be."

Ruth Elgin entered the cabin, her heart in her mouth; but she dashed aside her tears, and determined to keep up her courage come what might.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIGHT ON THE LEDGE.

WHEN Dick Dunwoody determined to face his three foes, he knew well that he was taking big chances.

But he was a man who knew not the feeling of fear, and in a good cause was ever ready to risk his life.

Dick Dunwoody had been born to fortune, and allowed a free purse by his parents in early boyhood, he had made money fly, so to speak.

Reared on a Southern plantation, he had become a perfect horseman and dead-shot before he was in his teens, and was inured to hardship and exposure as he indulged in all manner of athletic sports, and was wont to spend weeks camping and hunting in the woods.

A private tutor, engaged for his especial education, was forced to go with his pupil upon his tramps did he wish to teach him anything, and a lover of sport himself, the teacher taught many a lesson by camp-fire light after a day spent in the chase.

Arriving at maturer years Dick Dunwoody had been sent to college, and there entered upon a wild life, though he was by no means a dissipated youth or a gambler.

He loved fun, and woe betide the luckless one who fell in his way for mischief.

The poor student he always befriended, and his pocket-book was ever open to the needy.

Those imposed upon he was their champion, and few dared meet him in battle.

In spite of his love of mischief and wild life, he possessed a brilliant mind and was a good student, standing high in his classes, though when he ever studied no one could find out.

Popular with teachers and students alike, he received the sympathy of all when he was called suddenly home by the death of his parents, who sunk in a Mississippi steamer that went down one night of storm and wreck.

But another shock came for the fatherless youth when it was found that his home and all must go, as his father was overwhelmed with debt.

Resigning all to his creditors, he sold out his personal effects and started for Texas.

There as country school-teacher, cowboy, and Texan Ranger he passed several years, and then went to the mines, where he struck it rich the first day of work.

Selling out for a few thousand dollars, he drifted into Mexico, then up the Pacific slope, and at last struck Golden Gulch the same light-hearted, generous, fearless nature as a man which he had possessed as a boy.

In his wandering he had seen the ups and downs of life, and many a thrilling and deadly scene had he been a chief actor in.

But his luck hung by him, and his cool courage, giant strength, and deadly aim always brought him through the direst troubles.

Such was the dashing, handsome young miner who had turned up as a hero in Golden Gulch, with an account of a few thousands to his credit in an Eastern bank, a frame of iron, indomitable pluck, perfect health, and a nature as genial as sunshine.

Loving adventure for its excitement, and fearful that Queen Helen might yet kill Horace Hammond, to whom and his lovely wife he had taken a great fancy, Dick Dunwoody had planned to capture the outlaw Amazon, and, as the result not only was well-nigh successful, but came painfully near losing his own life in the attempt.

Having gotten himself into the scrape it was not in his nature to back out, and he determined, as he said to himself:

"To trail the pretty devil to her den."

Finding that he was opposed by three desperadoes, he boldly took the lead in opening the battle, and got a shot in first, bringing down his man before the other two cut-throats could fire.

Then their pistol, and the second shot of Dick Dunwoody flashed together.

He had hoped to "bag" the party, expecting no resistance under the pressure of his two revolvers, and thus be able to carry them to Golden Gulch for "hanging purposes," as he expressed it.

But he found the trio were made of sterner stuff, or that, driven to desperation by their danger, they preferred death by the bullet to hanging.

Which motive prompted their resistance he had no time to discover, so opened the ball with the result of one dead man to his credit on the first fire.

As I have said the next three shots flashed almost together.

But Dick Dunwoody's was an atom of a second the quickest, and sinking into the bosom of the man he aimed at destroyed his aim, for his shot flew wild, as he went down upon his face, digging his nails into the hard rock.

But the third of the two fired with better aim, and with the assurance, from what he had seen, that it was his last chance for life.

He had pulled trigger a trifle quick however, before he had the muzzle over the heart of his foe, and he uttered a cry of joy as he saw Dunwoody spin half round and stagger backward.

It would have been better for him instead of crowing had he fired a second shot, for, though evidently hit by the bullet of his foe, and with one hand dropping suddenly to his side, the young miner raised the revolver held in his left and pulled trigger not three seconds after the flash of his other pistol.

The desperado was springing toward him as the bullet met him squarely in the forehead, and he fell with a sickening thud upon the rocks.

Dick Dunwoody then looked down at his feet, where lay his pistol, and saw what had saved his life, for the bullet of his foe had struck the trigger-guard, giving him a shock and benumbing his hand for awhile.

But a little brisk rubbing soon restored the hand and arm to its former strength, and the young miner set to work to clear the field of the dead, and at the same time seek a safe retreat for himself, as he knew that Queen Helen and her band were then on their way to the ridge.

"It will be a mystery to them to know what has become of me, and of those who lariated me, and I'll get rid of these bodies the quickest and easiest way possible," he said, while his eyes fell upon the shelf below, along which ran the stage road, and beyond it the precipice which went sheer down, hundreds of feet, to the forest-clad valley at its base.

It was no slight task he set himself, of hurling two hundred pounds weight across that shelf, which, though narrow for a stage-drive, was wide enough to make a man hesitate at tossing a human form over it to the depths beyond.

But he seized one of the dead men by the hands and began to turn with him, swinging him off from him as he did so, and when going at a rapid motion, while just at the edge of the ledge, he let go, the form being stretched out over the cliff.

Away it flew through the air, while the shock flung Dunwoody down.

Springing to his feet he gazed over upon the shelf, but saw no sign of the body, while just then came to his ears the crashing of the dead man in the tree-tops far below.

"So far good.

"It would be more human to bury them, but I have not the time, and the graves would be soon found by the outlaws.

"You next!" and so saying he seized the second body, and, in the same way as before, sent it flying off into mid-air.

Again he was thrown down, and again heard the sickening sound of the form crashing through the tree-tops hundreds of feet below.

The third body shared the same fate, and, dizzy with his whirling, Dick Dunwoody sat down to rest.

He had selected two of the best revolvers of the trio and stuck them into his belt, and then set out upon his search for a secure hiding-place for himself, as he was now determined to follow the trail of the outlaws to their lair.

His hiding-place was in the top of a thickly foliaged tree, and from there he beheld the coming of the band, their mystified appearance at their failure to discover any trace of him or his foes, and then their departure.

It was nearly sunset when they departed, but Dick Dunwoody at once descended from his place of concealment and set forth on the trail of the cutlaws.

His experience in Texas and on the border had made him a thorough prairie-man and mountaineer, and he followed them with the same ease that an Indian could have done.

"It will soon be too dark for me to go further," he muttered; "but I can camp on their trail and be ready for work on the morrow."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED SHOT.

"WELL, Monk, you are determined to try the road again," said Faro Fred, as Monk Harris came out of the hotel to mount his box, the

morning after his flight from the outlaws, and the unsuccessful search for Queen Helen and her band by the Regulators.

"Waal, I guesses I are, Pard Fred, fer I wasn't born in ther woods ter be skeert by a owl," answered the plucky driver.

"No, but I am afraid the outlaws will knock you off of your box some time, Monk."

"They may do it, Pard Fred, an' ef they does it will be my time ter turn my toes up to ther daisies; but I won't complain."

"I believe you, Monk; but who goes out with you this morning?"

"They say Mr. Hart goes along."

"The one who was wonned the other day?"

"Thet same, Faro Fred."

"Doc Powell told him he were well enough to go and be intends to light out fer other parts.

"Guess he hain't pleased with Golden Gulch what he hev seen of it."

"And I am not pleased with him, Monk, for somewhere I have seen his face before and not under pleasant circumstances I know, though I cannot recall where and when."

"I am glad he is going, but keep your eye on him, Monk," and Faro Fred turned away just as the man registered as Henry Hart, but whom the reader knows as Black Bill, came out upon the piazza ready for his journey, and accompanied by Jockey Tim bearing his traps.

He looked pale and somewhat anxious, bowed coolly to Faro Fred and entered the stage.

Then Monk Harris sprung up to his box, seized the reins, and drove swiftly away from Golden Gulch.

It was not without some dread that Monk Harris approached the canyon known as Queen Helen's Toll-gate, for he felt that the outlaws would doubtless hold him responsible for the act of Dick Dunwoody, and also feel revengeful toward him for having fired his pistol to alarm the Regulators when Ruth Elgin was captured.

Still he was no man to shrink from duty, and he drove on, ready to face the worst.

Under a seat of the coach he had an express bag of gold amounting to several thousand dollars, and he was fearful lest this should be taken from him.

"My duty are ter drive ther hearse through, and not ter fight," said Monk to himself, and he ainded:

"Ef it did so happen I c'u'd lay out a couple o' them black varmints an' git away, I'd do it, tho' I didn't git pay fer ther work."

"Thet feller inside, what Faro Fred don't like, sartinly showed grit t'other day, an' he may take it in his head ter stand off ther outlaws ter-day, an' ef he do, I'll back him up."

"I'd jest like ter hev the Wizard Miner, Doc Powell, Faro Fred and Kid Gloves inside ther hearse, an' me an' Hank Talbot be on ther box once when ther queen an' her gang tackled us fer dust."

"Lordy! but wouldn't ther fur fly then?" and Monk was indulging in a laugh at the thought of the surprise the outlaws would receive, when he was fairly startled as a human voice broke on his ear with:

"Hold on, driver, please."

"Ahl it are you, pard," and Monk Harris bent over and looked into the stage.

"Yes, I called to you to ask that you draw rein and allow me to ride on the box with you," said the passenger.

"Sartin, tho' this hain't no healthy place to stop in."

"Come, bounce up ef yer hes a mind ter."

The stage came to a halt and the door was thrown open by Black Bill, who sprung out and then clambered half-way up to the box.

Watching ahead in the canyon, Monk Harris did not observe that his passenger held a cocked revolver in his hand, until he thrust it squarely in his face, with the words:

"Hold, my man, for I leave you here; but I take the gold you carry, with me."

"Durnation! pard, is you a high-flyer rascal, too?" cried Monk Harris, in utter amazement.

"I am, and I demand the gold you carry," was the stern reply.

"Who in thunder said I hed any dust along?"

"I saw the agent give it to you early this morning."

"And you is a robber?"

"I am."

"S'pose I doesn't pony up?"

"Then I will kill you and take it."

"You sartinly hev ther power, fer yer shooter covers me," coolly said Monk Harris.

"And I have the will."

"Quick! out with that gold, or your life will pay the forfeit of your refusal."

"Say, pard, t'other day you was fightin' road-agents, an' now yer is playin' thar leetle game on me."

"True; but then I was about to be robbed, and now I am robbing."

"I are a poor man, an' luck hev been durned hard on me o' late, an' ther comp'ny 'll put me off ef I gits robbed so often."

"They will find the man who fills your place robbed just the same."

"But it is not you that I intend to rob, but the company."

"No, for I doesn't carry nothin' fer yer ter

steal; but it hurts me jist as bad fer yer ter take what are given ter me ter take car' of."

"Come, none of this nonsense, but out with the dust," sternly said Black Bill.

Monk Harris saw that there was no hope, that he was in the hands of a merciless desperado, and must yield or lose his life.

If he attempted resistance his instant death must follow, and that would not save the gold.

He gave a deep sigh, and was about to obey the command by telling where the gold was, when he saw ride out of the ravine on one side Queen Helen and her band.

"Ahl it are all up with me," he groaned.

But as he uttered the words there came a sharp report from the side of the canyon, and Monk Harris heard the thud of a bullet, saw the red life-current flow from the forehead of the robber, who fell backward to the ground.

Then, in ringing tones, came the words:

"Drive for your life, Harris, and I will keep yonder devils in check!"

Monk Harris saw no one, but he had seen the result of the shot, and he knew to whom that trumpet voice belonged, and, as he yelled to his team to jump ahead, he cried:

"It are ther Wizard Miner, or I ther devil's cousin."

CHAPTER XXIV.

WOUNDED.

QUEEN HELEN, the Amazon of the Overland, seemed to reason well and govern her actions accordingly.

She had vowed revenge against Horace Hammond, and had laid her plans well to accomplish it.

Not a quick revenge, as she could have had by killing him, and in spite of his numerous escapades, he like any other man, was vulnerable.

But she was determined to strike at his heart through those he loved.

She had gone from the grave of her brother, Blonde Bill, hanged by Horace Hammond, with a vow of retribution, caring naught for the fact that her brother had deserved his fate.

She felt no gratitude to him for sparing her from a life of misery in prison; but at once set to work to perfect her plans.

She had quietly enlisted half a score of picked men and gone with them to the mountains.

There she had worked for weeks to secure a safe retreat, to which, situated in the most impregnable part of the mountain fastnesses, she had arranged her ways of ingress and egress in a manner that would defy pursuit.

Then she had gone to Golden Gulch, from a station back on the Overland, to arrange with spies she had there, and who will appear all in good time.

Going there as the Vaile Lady, she had en route, as the reader is aware, been brought face to face with another band of Road Agents, who had taken to the trail under a noted desperado by the name of Pathfinder, and one who had had his life spared by Horace Hammond at the time he strung up Blonde Bill and let Queen Helen and Black Bill go free.

Bravely had she sprung to the side of Dick Dunwoody on the day of Pathfinder's attack, and defended the stage, thus making a heroine of herself in the eyes of all at Golden Gulch.

Although not appearing to know the man registering as Henry Hart, but who in reality was Black Bill, he yet had gone there as her ally, to be her informer regarding the movements of Horace Hammond, for he had refused to take the lieutenancy, afterward given to Carlos, but which she had offered to him.

He said that he cared not to take the field again, but would serve as a spy and an aide in Golden Gulch.

The man had also a motive for going there, which was his own secret.

When captured with Blonde Bill upon a former occasion, it had been left to Ruby Roland, as she then was, to decide their fate, and she had set them free.

They had broken their vows of reformation made to her, but Black Bill, when the maiden had fallen into the hands of his chief, had done what he could to set her free.

And, learning to love her, though she was the wife of another, he had indulged in hope that, should accident take off Horace Hammond, he might win her love.

A man of such marked appearance, with his long, black hair and beard, he had shaved off the one and cut the other short, and felt safe in his disguise.

But the sharp eyes of Frank Powell had penetrated his disguise, and he had either to leave Golden Gulch, as the doctor ordered, or suffer the consequences, which would have been his speedy death.

He had departed as ordered, but been true to his nature of evil by trying to rob the coach of the treasure which Monk Harris carried.

That he would have been successful there is no doubt, had it not been for the unexpected shot which had brought the robber down and enabled Monk Harris to drive off just as the band of outlaws appeared upon the scene, with the Amazon Queen at their head.

Queen Helen knew that Monk Harris was her bitter foe, and she would gladly have made him

suffer; but she was politic enough to see that if the coach-drivers were killed the coaches would be taken off, as no one would be willing to take the risk of driving them through.

Consequently, Monk Harris was, in a manner, safe, for the stage company would run their coaches as long as passengers would be found willing to risk the dangers of Overland travel and miners to send gold out of Golden Gulch.

Upon dashing upon the scene, Queen Helen was amazed to find her spy lying prone upon the ground.

He was not dead, yet had received a wound which held his life in the balance.

In a word he told her of his recognition by Frank Powell, and his having been forced to leave Golden Gulch, with his bold attempt at robbery, and the shot and words that followed.

"From whence came the shot?" asked Queen Helen, as she knelt by the side of the wounded man, while one of the outlaws supported him in his arms.

The lips moved as if about to reply, when again came the sharp report, and the outlaw that held Black Bill dropped back dead, a bullet in his brain.

Instantly all eyes searched for their deadly foe, and the sides of the canyon were slowly scanned for some sign of the smoke of the weapon which had sent forth the fatal shot.

But nowhere was a puff of smoke visible, and no human form could be seen.

Yet that the eye of one who appeared to be merciless was upon them there could be no doubt, and raising Black Bill in their arms, and dragging the dead body, they hastened to the nearest cover under shelter of the ravine.

But as they retreated there came another shot from the unseen foe, and a wild cry followed it, for the bullet aimed at the heart of one of the men, had glanced upon a revolver-barrel, and buried itself in the shoulder of Queen Helen.

She staggered back, white as a corpse, and the words upon her lips:

"Great Heaven! am I to die unavenged?"

"No, no! this wound cannot be fatal—it shall not be, for I will not die unavenged!"

She fell back into the arms of Carlos as she uttered the words, and then came the stern order of the outlaw lieutenant:

"Quick, men! to our camp, or we will be picked off here by that mysterious foe, whoever he be!"

CHAPTER XXV.

CAUGHT NAPPING.

It was with considerable haste that the outlaw band raised their wounded queen, Black Bill, and their dead comrade in their arms, and beat a retreat up the ravine to the spot where they ascended the cliff.

The man left on duty there quickly lowered the box, and Queen Helen was carried up by Carlos and one other, while two more of the band followed with Black Bill, leaving the remainder of the men to come in with the horses.

Before starting with the animals, one of the band, a young and dashing fellow, determined to make some effort to discover who was their mysterious foe, and from whence had been fired the three shots so well aimed.

For this purpose he called to two of his companions to accompany him, and leaving their horses with the others to go on to camp, he ascended the cliff and made a circuit of the canyon, and came out upon the mountain side at the ledge where Dick Dunwoody had so nearly lost his life.

Tying their lariats together, the three outlaws passed them around the cedar tree growing upon the ledge, and thus lowered themselves to the ledge, drawing the lassoes after them.

Once there they started toward Golden City, taking advantage of every chance they had of concealment.

They had not gone far before the quick eye of the young man acting as leader detected a hazy cloud hanging over the tree-tops of a small ravine down in the valley.

"There is a smoke down there, pard," he said.

"Waal, thar must be fire," responded one of his comrades.

"Yes, and if a fire, there must be human beings near it."

"Come, we will keep on the ridge, and that will give us a chance to look down into the ravine."

As he spoke Happy Hugh, as the young man was called, led the way down the steep mountainside to a low ridge, beyond which the smoke was visible, lazily floating above the tree-tops.

Creeping along the ridge, guided by the smoke, they came to a precipitous edge, which looked down into a small canyon, or natural lane.

It was thickly wooded, a stream glided through it, and certainly it appeared a safe retreat.

Beneath the cliff was the fire from whence came the smoke, and boiling some venison steaks upon it were two men.

That they felt secure in their retreat was evident, and, under ordinary circumstances, cer-

tainly would have been, for they were off the trail and had no fear of road-agents venturing there.

But there was a circumstance working against them for which they had not counted, and that was Dick Dunwoody upon the trail, and whose unerring shots had set Happy Hugh and his two comrades to solve the mystery as to who he was and where were his haunts.

The three outlaws, as they peered cautiously over the ravine, seemed pleased with their discovery, for their eyes brightened.

Then, as the two unsuspicious men sat down to their meal, their belts of arms and traps lying near them, six revolvers covered them, and Happy Hugh called out sternly:

"Hands up, pard!"

The two men were certainly caught napping and started at the stern command.

But their eyes following the sound of the voice, they beheld six revolvers covering them, for the outlaws held a weapon in each hand.

They saw three masked faces and knew that their foes belong to Queen Helen's band.

To resist would be certain death, for their enemies were not ten feet from them.

To surrender might bring their death, yet while they lived they had hope.

"Hands up!" shouted Happy Hugh, as the two men hesitated, as though thinking whether to obey or take the chances of the shots.

"All right, we surrender," was the cool reply of one of the men.

"You are wise to do so."

"You, King, go round the ravine and take their weapons, while we keep them covered," said Happy Hugh.

The one addressed as King quickly obeyed, and in ten minutes' time stood in the ravine by the side of the prisoners.

Having taken their weapons he proceeded to bind their hands securely behind them, and then to tie the arms of the two men together as they stood side by side.

Then Happy Hugh and his other pard went down into the ravine, and the former said:

"You are the Kid Glove Miner, ar'n't you?"

"Yes, I am so called," was the quiet answer of the one addressed.

"And you are the Magic Doctor of the Golden Gulch?" and Happy Hugh addressed the other prisoner, who answered in an indifferent way:

"My name is Frank Powell."

"I know you, sir, and I am glad we have been so fortunate as to have captured you, for you will have to cure the wounds you made."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you fired from ambush and wounded Black Bill, just as he was robbing the stage in which he had come as passenger from Golden Gulch."

"It is no such thing, for neither my comrade or myself have fired a shot to-day, though I am glad to hear that some one has brought punishment upon Black Bill," said Doctor Powell.

"Perhaps you will deny killing one of my band too?"

"I only regret that I did not have that pleasure."

"And your comrade?" and Happy Hugh turned to Horace Hammond who responded:

"It is my regret also not to have been the one who killed your villainous comrade."

"And you deny also, I suppose, that you shot at another of the band, and that your bullet glancing upon his pistol, wounded Queen Helen."

"Hal! is she hit?" cried both Frank Powell and Horace Hammond in a breath.

"She is."

"Hard hit?"

"I do not know."

"Where is she wounded?" asked Frank Powell.

"In the shoulder."

"Well, she is vulnerable then, I am glad to know."

"And you will have to save her, for I shall carry you to her camp," said Happy Hugh.

"As we are in your clutches we can only obey," said Frank Powell, who seemed rather anxious to go to the outlaw camp.

"Well, we will start at once; but you must be blindfolded securely, and at certain points on the trail you must expect to be carried."

"We do not care how we go, so that you get us there," said Frank Powell, and the outlaws and their prisoners set off on their way to the hidden camp, the latter being most securely blindfolded and each one led by one of their captors.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE OUTLAWS SURPRISED.

HAPPY HUGH and his pards certainly thought that they had in their clutches none other than those who had fired the unerring shots which had killed one outlaw, wounded Black Bill, and also perhaps cut short the career of Queen Helen.

Their denial of the fact they did not put faith in, for, accustomed to lie themselves, as well as steal and kill, they could not understand why any one else should tell the truth if a falsehood would do.

They little knew the character of either

Frank Powell or Horace Hammond, for they were men who would not sneak behind a lie to save them from peril.

Caught as they had been in the immediate vicinity of the shots, evidently bent on some mischief, Happy Hugh congratulated himself upon having captured the secret foes, who had bit such rapid and hard blows upon the band; but also he had the satisfaction of feeling that he had in his power the worst enemy of Queen Helen.

"She's the woman to put Carlos in the ranks, and make me her lieutenant," he said to himself as he led his prisoners along.

There was also another reason for self-congratulation upon the part of Happy Hugh, and that was the fact of having as a prisoner one who could skillfully dress the wounds of Queen Helen.

As they emerged from the ravine into the canyon, on their way to the cliff, where was the secret means of retreat to the camp in the mountains, a sharp report was heard, and one of the three outlaws dropped dead.

All of the party, the prisoners as well as their captors, were startled by the deadly shot.

Happy Hugh and his remaining comrade were particularly taken aback, for they had believed that they had with them those who had before fired the mysterious shots, and suddenly discovered that they were mistaken.

"Come, Girty, run your man to cover quick, and I'll get mine there," cried Happy Hugh, and the two outlaws hastened their prisoners up the canyon, leaving the body of the slain road-agent where he had fallen.

That he was dead they knew, for the bullet had struck him squarely in the forehead.

Keeping under the shelter of the overhanging rocks, they pushed on to the cliff.

Then Happy Hugh gave a signal, and the head of a road-agent appeared above.

Wishing to keep the means of their retreat a secret, Happy Hugh made signs to the man above to lower the trap, and it was noiselessly done.

Then Happy Hugh clambered up the rope to the top of the cliff, to aid the man at the windlass, leaving his comrade below with the prisoners.

Blindfolded and bound as they were both Horace Hammond and Doctor Powell were utterly helpless, and obeyed the command of the outlaw to come with him, and they were led into the trap, and quietly hauled up to the cliff above.

There Happy Hugh joined them and they hastened on toward the camp in the depths of the mountain, whither Queen Helen had already been borne.

Arriving there they found that Queen Helen was suffering greatly, and that Black Bill was said to be dying.

"Here, Girty, take this man to the jug and see that he does not escape."

"You, Doctor Powell, will go with me, for Queen Helen needs your services," said Happy Hugh, and, proud of his capture, he led his blindfolded prisoner to the cabin of the outlaw Amazon.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WOUNDED AMAZON.

INTO the cabin of the beautiful, yet wicked leader of the outlaw band, Happy Hugh led his prisoner.

He found her reclining upon her cot, her face pale, and the mark of suffering upon it.

By her side sat Ruth Elgin, also pale and anxious-looking.

"Ah! Hugh, who have you there?" asked the woman, as Frank Powell was brought into the cabin, for, blindfolded as he was she did not recognize him.

"I thought, queen, that I could find our mysterious foe, and took with me two of the band in the search."

"We came upon this gentleman and one other, encamped in a canyon, and surprised and captured them," answered the young man, who, upon entering the cabin had removed the mask from his face, thereby displaying a countenance by no means unattractive, though it was a trifle reckless.

"You did well, Hugh, to make the capture, but after robbing them you should have set them free, or killed them, for we cannot afford to have our retreat known," sternly said the Amazon.

"I well know that, Queen Helen, but these prisoners are most important, one of them being none other than the Magic Doctor of Golden Gulch."

"Hal! you are indeed Frank Powell," and the woman turned on her cot and fixed her eyes upon the doctor, though the effort made her writhe with pain.

"Yes; I am Frank Powell," was the calm reply, while Ruth Elgin, who had seen him with Horace Hammond, said earnestly:

"Oh, sir, I am sorry to see that this wicked woman has you in her power also."

"And I am most deeply pained to know that you are at her mercy, Miss Elgin, for though I cannot see you, I recognize your voice."

"Take that bandage from his eyes, Hugh," commanded the Amazon Queen.

Happy Hugh quickly obeyed, while he said:

"I brought him here, Queen Helen, to look after your wound, for his skill is great."

"Yes, and I thank you, Hugh; but will you serve a foe, Doctor Powell?" and she turned to the prisoner, from whose eyes had been taken the bandage.

"I certainly will aid you if in my power, Miss Weldon," was the low reply.

"Unbind him, Hugh."

This was also done, and Queen Helen said:

"Now, Hugh, leave the cabin, but await outside, and soon you shall know whether this wound is mortal and I die unavenged."

Frank Powell never went without his small case of surgical instruments and a like one of medicines, and these he took from their place upon his belt where he kept them.

Stepping to the side of the cot he bored the shoulder of the woman and glanced at the wound that marred its polished surface.

She gazed anxiously into his face, while Ruth Elgin stood across the room leaning against the wood mantle.

"Well?" asked the woman, as she saw Frank Powell regarding the wound most attentively, while steadily the blood oozed from it.

"It does not look well, for, frankly, you have received a dangerous wound."

"I feared it; I felt it."

"But you can save my life?" she said, eagerly.

"I can try."

"You must do it, for I am not going to die with my work left undone."

"I do not fear death for death's sake; but I do fear to die with my vow left unfulfilled."

"Save me, Frank Powell, and I will forgive you, even though you stood by and helped murder my poor brother."

"Woman, your brother richly deserved his fate; but I am not here to discuss that affair, so will see what I can do for you."

"Thank you; save my life and I will, as I said, set you free."

Frank Powell made no reply, but attentively regarded the wound for an instant, while he moved her arm to and fro.

Taking his probe he inserted it into the wound, the woman uttering no cry of pain though she set her even white teeth hard together.

"It is even worse than I thought, and you have gone too long without attention," he said.

"It could not be helped, for there was no one here to aid me."

"I can find the bullet and extract it, though."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

He went to work again, and after a while said:

"Yes, I can extract the bullet; and it must be done at once, ere it irritates the bone and causes inflammation to follow."

"I am ready, so go ahead," and the woman nervously herself to bear all pain.

"I am not ready."

"Ahl! you have not the proper instruments?"

"Yes, I have them here."

"Do you need medicines?"

"No, for I have a case here with me."

"What then do you mean?"

"Terms," was the quiet response.

"I promised you your freedom."

"That is not enough."

"What more can you ask?"

"Let me tell you that to save your life I must remain here until you are wholly out of danger, even if weeks pass by."

"You are dangerously wounded, the bullet having been turned by the guard of a revolver, as I understand it, and consequently mashed out of shape, which makes the wound a ragged one."

"Then I find the bullet down on the shoulder-joint, and altogether it looks very bad for you."

"Do what you can."

"Upon conditions!"

"Name them," impatiently said the woman.

"I had a friend with me when I was captured."

"Who is he?"

"A friend of mine who was out hunting with me, when your men came upon us and surprised us," answered Frank Powell, withholding the name of Horace Hammond as he remembered that Happy Hugh had not made it known.

"Well, you wish his freedom with your own?" said the woman.

"Yes, and more."

"What more?"

"I must remain here to care for you, while he must go at once."

"No."

"As you please, Miss Weldon," was the cool reply, and Frank Powell arose and walked over toward the spot where Ruth Elgin stood.

"You do not refuse to help me if I decline to grant your request?" she asked petulantly.

"I most certainly do," was the answer, and in a tone that showed he meant just what he said.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRANK POWELL'S TERMS.

"WHAT do you ask?" the woman said, as a twinge of pain admonished her that what had to be done to save her must be done at once.

"I ask that my friend be allowed to depart at once from your camp."

"And thus betray us?"

"No; he came as I did—blindsight."

"Will you gain from him a pledge that he will make no effort to find this retreat, or to lead a band of men against us?"

Frank Powell saw that the woman would consent only on such terms, and he said:

"Yes, I will exact such a pledge from him."

"Enough. Call Happy Hugh, that I may summon your friend here and order him set free."

"Miss Weldon, you must keep perfectly quiet, or I will not answer for the consequences."

"I will permit no one to see you, and you can simply give your order to the man, Hugh, when I call him to the door."

"As you please."

"Please call him!" said the woman, resignedly.

Frank Powell stepped to the door and called to the young outlaw, barring his entrance as he attempted to enter, with:

"No; your queen is in too precarious a condition to be disturbed, so I will give you your orders, and she will answer if they are right."

"Is this so, Queen Helen?" asked Happy Hugh.

"Yes!"

"Now, sir," continued Frank Powell, "you are to take this young lady and—"

"Ha! what do you mean?" cried the woman, excitedly.

"I mean that you are to set this poor girl free, and my friend will take her with him to Golden Gulch," was the very cool response.

"Never! I will—"

"Sh! you must calm yourself, Miss Weldon," urged Frank Powell.

"I said not the girl, for she is my especial game, and through her I am to have part of my revenge."

"No! no! she must remain here!"

"You will die if I neglect your wound."

"Let me die! ay, I will die a thousand deaths rather than give her up."

Frank Powell saw that the woman was in earnest, and more, he felt, if she knew that Horace Hammond was then a prisoner in the camp, in her excited state she would be willing to die to visit upon him some fearful revenge.

He was anxious to save Ruth Elgin, but he knew it could not be done then, and to save Horace Hammond he must lose no time.

So, with a glance at Ruth Elgin he said:

"As you please, Miss Weldon, I will only ask the release of my friend now."

"As for myself I must remain here, to save you, and give up my practice in Golden Gulch."

"But, as you insist upon keeping Miss Elgin here, she will be a good nurse for you, I know," and Frank Powell again looked at the young girl in a peculiar way, and understanding that he was acting as her friend and for the best, she said:

"Of course I will not be so unwomanly as to allow one of my own sex, though my foe, to suffer for want of kindly nursing."

"Enough! then you two remain, and your friend can go."

"Do you hear that, Hugh?"

"Yes, Queen Helen, but—"

"You must not fret Miss Weldon, sir, by longer talk and delay."

"Take the man you captured with me, to the canyon and let him go free!" sternly said Frank Powell, who saw that the outlaw wished to parley.

"But he must go blindsfolded, and give his pledge not to attempt to find my retreat, or give instructions that may lead to the secret being discovered by others," said Queen Helen.

"Bring him to the cabin and I will exact such a pledge from him," said Powell, determined to put a bold face upon the matter.

Happy Hugh disappeared, but soon after returned with Horace Hammond.

"Captain," said Frank Powell, stepping to the door, and giving Horace Hammond a sign of warning:

"Captain, the outlaw queen is seriously wounded, and she consents, if I remain and take care of her, that you shall at once be set free, and, when she is out of danger she promises to set me free also."

"You are therefore to be taken, by your captor here, back to the canyon, and released; but you are to give to me your pledge not to attempt to find your way back here, nor to give such directions as will lead others to do so."

"Do you give such pledge, captain?"

The moment he had addressed him as captain, Horace Hammond saw that the doctor was playing a part.

What that part was he had no means of knowing; but he had the utmost confidence in Frank Powell, and determined to do as he wished.

He longed to ask about Ruth Elgin, for from where he stood he could not see into the cabin, but simply around.

"Yes."

"Do you vouch for your friend's keeping his pledge?" called out Queen Helen.

"I do, and you can hold me responsible if the captain breaks it," firmly said the doctor.

"Let him go, Hugh," feebly said the woman, and the heart of Frank Powell gave a bound of joy as he saw the outlaw lead the prisoner away, after having securely blindsfolded and bound him once more.

Then he quickly turned to the wounded woman, and she saw that he was really anxious to do his part to serve her, from the earnest and skillful manner in which he set to work.

The bullet was soon found and extracted, the wound dressed, a soothing medicine given her and Powell had done his duty even toward an outlaw.

Leaving Ruth Elgin to care for her, and having secretly written a few lines to her to explain all and bid her hope, he stepped outside of the cabin, to find a guard there armed with a rifle.

"There are your quarters, doctor," said the guard, pointing to a wicky-up near the cabin.

"All right, my man; but is there not more work for me to do?"

"You means Black Bill?"

"Yes."

"He are so bad off I guesses you kin do him no good."

"I can at least try."

"You will find him in yonder shanty; but I warns you not to go beyond it."

"I do not intend to throw my life away, my man," answered Frank Powell, as he walked toward the spot where Black Bill was lying, desperately wounded.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BLACK BILL'S CONFESSION.

As the outlaw guard had said, Frank Powell found Black Bill in a "bad way."

It was evident that he had been hard hit, and that recovery was most doubtful.

He seemed dazed when he saw the doctor, and only after several minutes did he recognize him.

He was lying upon a rustic bed, and about him were gathered several members of the band, among them Carlos, the lieutenant.

The news of Happy Hugh's valuable capture was known to all, and also the terms on which the Magic Doctor had agreed to help the queen, so that Carlos said, as Frank Powell entered:

"Well, sir, what of Queen Helen?"

"She is doing as well as can be expected, for her wound is a serious one."

"Will she live?"

"I believe that she will pull through, if kept quiet, for she has a kind nurse in Miss Elgin, even though she be the captive and foe of your queen."

"And you, doctor?"

"I shall remain in your camp until Queen Helen is out of danger."

"That is kind of you."

"No, for I do so under compulsion; but what of Black Bill?"

"He's going, I fear!"

Frank Powell dropped his hand lightly upon the flickering pulse, and then said:

"Well, Blackstone, I am sorry to see that you have such an end."

It was some time before the wounded man realized who was with him, and then he said:

"Will I die, doctor?"

"I will make a thorough examination of your wound, and tell you frankly the result."

This he did, and then came the eager question:

"What is your answer, Powell?"

"You wish me to tell you frankly?"

"I do."

"You have not twenty-four hours to live."

"Oh God! to die, and to die as I do, an outlaw, away from home, friends and all."

"This is fearful, Powell."

"It is hard, but you took the chances and you lost the game."

"I am sorry for you, Blackstone; but I must tell you, if you have any message to leave for the living, you had better not delay, for your end is near."

"Powell, you have been kind to me and once saved my life when I was shot down in the mountains, upon my first visit to Elgin Mine."

"Will you hear a confession which I have to make, and pledge yourself to do one act of justice for me?"

"Yes, if in my power."

"Pards, leave me alone with the doctor," said Black Bill, and his voice was faint.

Quickly the outlaws left the shanty, Carlos remaining to say:

"Pard Bill, if you are certain that death has its grip on you, then talk: but if not, don't give yourself away."

"The doctor says that I cannot live."

"You would not lie to a man in my position, Powell?" and the eyes were turned pleadingly upon the face of Frank Powell, who answered:

"No, nor to any other man."

"I tell you frankly, William Blackstone, that you will not live until the morrow's sun rises."

"I have no more to say, doctor, for I have always heard you were square clean through,

if you have made it hot for road-agents," and Carlos left the shanty.

For some minutes there was a dead silence, and then Black Bill said in a low tone:

"Sit down by me, doctor."

The request was quietly acquiesced in.

"Doctor Powell, do you know that you called me by a name awhile ago, which is not my own?"

"That of Black Bill?"

"Oh, no, for that name, as you know, was given me in the mines, after I broke loose from all restraint and showed my hand of deviltry."

"You called me William Blackstone!"

"Yes."

"That is not my name."

"Why you so represented yourself to me both by letter and word."

"True; but I played a part, and now that the hand of death is laid upon me, I wish to make a confession to you, doctor."

"You remember, after the murder of Elegant Ed and his Angel, that among his papers was found one that left their gold and effects to one William Blackstone, of Leavenworth, Kansas?"

"Yes."

"You wrote to William Blackstone, telling him of his good fortune?"

"I did."

"He had aided Ed Elgin in the past, and then they had some interests together, so that both the miner and his young and beautiful wife were most willing to help him, should accident befall them."

"Hence they left the paper I referred to."

"At the time your letter arrived, William Blackstone was laid up with a severe wound he had received in a broil, and I was his nurse."

"You?"

"Yes, doctor, for Will Blackstone was my first cousin, and we looked strangely alike."

"I read the letter to him, and the devil entered my breast at once."

"Luck had been against me, and I saw a chance to better my fortunes."

"I was a gambler, and I saw before me a life of luxury by the commission of a crime."

"Will was badly wounded, and few thought he would recover, though he was in a fair way for it when your letter arrived."

"I committed the crime, doctor, and the next day buried poor Will."

"Then I came West armed with your letter, and you turned over the property of Elegant Ed and his Angel to me."

"I gambled away the mine, as you know, to Horace Hammond, and then lost at the gaming-table all the gold you had transferred to me."

"Reckless, nay, desperate, I went from bad to worse, and became a low villain, winning the name of Black Bill."

"Since then you know pretty well my career; but you did not suspect that I had leagued myself to Helen Weldon as an outlaw, and was her spy in Golden Gulch."

"You recognized me and drove me away from the Gold Brick, and sent me to my doom, for I fell by the hand of that young miner, Dunwoody."

"Ha! do you mean it?"

"Yes, he fired the shot, I know, for I saw him for an instant and recognized him, though I said nothing."

"Thank Heaven no harm has befallen him, then," said Frank Powell, fervently.

"No; he is fully able to take care of himself, and Carlos told me awhile since that another of the band had fallen under his unerring aim."

"Now, doctor, let me beg that you will send what money I have, and it amounts to a few thousands, to the people of William Blackstone, for they are poor."

"The gold was not honestly made, but they will not know that."

"In the wallet you will find in my coat, is their address, and a paper to show you where the money is concealed."

"Tell them I was killed in the mines, that is all, and left my diggings to them."

"As for you, doctor, do all you can to keep out of the way of Queen Helen, for you, as well as Horace Hammond, are down in her book of revenge, and she will keep her vow if she lives."

"If she dies under you hands I warn you that the band will kill you, believing that you could have saved her."

"Now, doctor, I have no more to say, so call in the boys and let them keep me company until I die, for you must go back to Queen Helen."

"When the men come in I will give you my wallet, and tell Carlos you are to write to my friends, so that they will understand all."

CHAPTER XXX.

HAPPY HUGH RENDERED UNHAPPY.

WHEN Horace Hammond left the outlaw camp, bound and blindfolded, and led by Happy Hugh, it was with no feeling of joy at his release.

He had started forth upon the attempt to rescue Ruth Elgin, and Frank Powell and Lanky the Hunter had been his companions in the bold enterprise.

But then all three of them knew well that strategy and not numbers could gain the victory against Queen Helen and her band.

Lanky had, unfortunately, sprained his ankle, and was forced to limp back to Golden Gulch, thus cutting down the reserve force to two.

And these two had been cleverly captured by Happy Hugh, who was happy indeed in having caught the one whom he knew Queen Helen hated above all others, and at the same time been instrumental in taking to her a surgeon who could save her life by his well-known skill.

Happy Hugh was sorry to give up Horace Hammond, but felt that his Queen had some good motive in allowing him to go, or knew the gravity of her situation was such as to cause her to agree to Frank Powell's terms.

As for Horace Hammond, he was convinced that Frank Powell was playing some deep game, and had kept from Queen Helen just who he was.

With the doctor in the outlaw camp, and the life of Queen Helen depending upon him, Horace Hammond knew that no harm would come to his friend, at least for the present.

But how would it all end?

And what about Ruth Elgin?

Powell had exacted from him a pledge that tied his hands, and it was certainly for the best, for a movement of the Vigilantes against the outlaws was to be dreaded, as it might precipitate the fate of the prisoners.

After arriving at the canyon, and just as the sun had disappeared behind the mountains, Happy Hugh halted and said:

"Pard, this is as far as I go."

"Well, you set me free here, I suppose?"

"Such are my orders, though, as I have thought over the matter, I begin to think Queen Helen didn't know who you was."

"Indeed! Why did you not tell her?"

"I had an idea then she did know, and I guess, now I think of it, it is best for me to take you back."

"You may do so if you like, but you will have only the trouble of bringing me back again, and it is not pleasant work, blindfolded and bound as I am, to go over the rough trail."

"You think she knew then?"

"Why, Powell was talking to her about me, and if she had not known me why did she not show some sign of recognition when she heard my voice?"

"It may be, and it may not, but I know that you are her particular game."

"Yes, I banged her outlaw brother, Blonde Bill, in punishment for his crimes, and let her go free."

"She vows vengeance, and Queen Helen is no slouch to go back on an oath, you can bet."

"No, for she has already robbed me of a considerable sum, and now has a kinswoman in her power."

"You mean the pretty girl we took out of the coach?"

"Yes."

"Well, Queen Helen will not spare her because she happens to be young and pretty."

"No, the woman is a bloodhound, and—"

"Don't slander my chief, sir, for I won't listen to it."

"Where is Miss Elgin?"

"You mean the young girl?"

"I do."

"She is at the cabin with Queen Helen."

"Do you know her intention regarding her?"

"No; but you may be certain, as the girl is your kin, the queen don't intend to make her happy."

"So I suppose; but come, let me go free, as you were ordered to do."

"No; I'll be sure, so I'll take you back to yonder thicket and tie you to a tree while I run back to camp and tell Queen Helen just who it is that I captured, for, the more I think of it, the more I feel she doesn't know."

"As you please, for you have the power."

"Well, if she then says let you go, I'll come back and turn you loose."

"But if she says fetch you back, back you go."

"All right," was the cool reply, and five minutes after Horace Hammond was bound to a tree, blindfolded and gagged, while Happy Hugh hastened back toward the camp, for night was casting dark shadows in the mountains.

Twilight faded and darkness settled down before the young outlaw returned.

But he knew the trail well, and as he approached the spot where he had left his prisoner he cried:

"I told you so, pard."

"The queen wants you back in camp."

But suddenly he started, glanced about him, and then cried aloud:

"Great God! he has gone!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

HAPPY HUGH TELLS HIS STORY.

WHEN Happy Hugh left his prisoner so securely bound he had not the remotest idea of meeting with a surprise upon his return.

Hastening to the wide elevator up at the terminus of the canyon, he gave the signal to the man kept constantly on duty there, and soon found himself upon the ridge.

"Did yer let him go, Pard Hugh?" asked the outlaw guard.

"No; but I tied him to a tree until I could run back to camp to see if the queen don't want that man, for I have an idea that she did not know who he was when she let him go," and Happy Hugh bastened on his way.

Arriving at the cabin, he found a guard pacing to and fro before the door, armed with a rifle.

"Loot'nent Carlos said as how it were better be on ther safe side, fer ther Magic Doc are ther devil when he tars loose," explained the guard.

"Yes; he is, indeed; but I think he is square where he gives his word, pard."

"Now, how is the queen?"

"I hain't no doctor ter jedge, Hugh; but I are thinking she is pretty bad."

Happy Hugh then knocked at the door and Frank Powell opened it.

By the glimmer of the still lingering twilight he recognized the man, and asked:

"Did you set my friend free?"

"No, doctor."

"What, sir! have you disobeyed the orders of Queen Helen?"

"I took it upon myself to do so, pard doctor."

"You have taken considerable upon yourself, my man, and I demand that you at once set my friend free."

"Not until I have asked Queen Helen one question," was the determined reply.

"What is it, Hugh?" faintly called out Queen Helen, hearing the voice of Happy Hugh.

"I wish to speak to you, Queen Helen."

"No, I forbid it," said Frank Powell, firmly, fearing that there was some underhanded work going on.

"I must see him, sir," urged the woman.

"I will not be answerable for the consequences to your life," said Powell.

"I will not get excited; but I must hear what he has to say, so admit him."

Frank Powell stepped aside, and the man entered and walked toward the cot.

Ruth Elgin sat near the fire, for the nights were growing chilly, and merely glanced up as Happy Hugh entered, while the doctor barred the door quietly, and walked over toward a table, from which he took something and thrust it into his pocket.

Then he motioned Happy Hugh one side, and sat down upon the cot of the wounded woman, resting his hand upon the aching shoulder in a gentle, soothing way.

"Now, my man, speak out; but if you have aught to say that will excite Queen Helen, I will check you, for her life hangs by a thread, I may say, unless she is kept quiet."

"I don't wish to excite Queen Helen, Doctor Powell; but I wish to tell her that I went to the canyon with the prisoner to set him free, as I was told to do."

"And yet you did not obey your orders, you told me?"

"No, doctor, I did not."

"Why was this, Hugh?" asked the woman.

"I came back to tell you why, Queen Helen, for I do not think you know who the man is that I captured with the Magic Doctor here."

"Ha! who was he?" asked Queen Helen, quickly, while Frank Powell urged:

"Miss Weldon, do not blame my want of skill, if you allow your men to worry and excite you."

"I wish to know who it was," petulantly said the woman.

"Your worst foe."

"What! Horace Hammond?" cried the woman.

"Yes, Queen Helen."

"And you let him go free?" she said, boarsely, her eyes flashing.

"No, Queen Helen, I did not."

"Thank Heaven!"

"Now where is he?"

"I bound him to a tree, blindfolded and gagged, while I came back to see if you really knew whom you were setting free."

"Noble Hugh! You shall step into Carlos's shoes for this good work, and he shall step out."

The eyes of the young outlaw glistened at this, and he said:

"Then I shall return the prisoner to camp?"

"At once."

"Oh, no! no! no!"

"Do not bring him here again, for I feel that you will kill him," cried Ruth Elgin, coming forward with hands clasped and anxious face.

"Silence, girl!"

"Horace Hammond shall be brought back, and once he is in my power, and I can see him die, I care not what becomes of me."

"Queen Helen, the outlaw, I have a word to say just here."

"One minute, my man, before you go!"

Frank Powell still kept his seat upon the cot, his left hand upon the wound and his right grasping a revolver which he had quickly drawn from his pocket and brought the muzzle to bear upon Happy Hugh.

"What means this?" gasped the woman.

Frank Powell was perfectly cool, and his hand that grasped the revolver was as firm as a rock while he answered:

"It means, Queen Helen, that you shall not break faith with me."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DOCTOR AT BAY.

THAT Queen Helen was taken aback at the determined stand of the Magic Doctor was certain, and Happy Hugh was completely caught off his guard by the very boldness of the act.

That a man alone in the midst of foes should attempt to dictate terms had not entered his head as a possibility.

But that he did intend so to do there was no doubt, and Queen Helen saw that he had armed himself with one of her revolvers.

"Do you threaten me?" asked the woman.

"Oh, no; I merely tell you that I shall not permit you to break faith with me," was the cool response.

"I have not broken faith with you."

"You intended to do so."

"How?"

"You set Horace Hammond free not knowing who he was, and now wish to bring him back here to kill him, for you are equal to it."

"I remained here to care for you, and I tell you that you would not have lived had I not cut that ragged bullet out of your shoulder."

"As it is, excited as you are, you are doing much to retard recovery, if not kill yourself."

"I pledge myself to remain here and bring you back to health and strength, so let Hammond go, and when you are well once more wage war upon him to your heart's content."

"No, we shall not escape me now, for I fear I may die, and, if I feel death's grip upon me, I want him here to die first, so that I will be avenged."

"Then you refuse to release him?"

"I do."

"Think, for I hold the winning hand."

"You?"

"Yes."

"I cannot see it."

"You shall if you refuse to let Hammond go."

"I do refuse."

"So be it."

"Now show your hand," she said, with a sneer.

"With pleasure."

"This hand, you see, rests upon your wound."

"Yes."

"One grasp, and I place you beyond hope of life, for I shall not only undo all that I have done, but so inflame the wound that recovery is impossible."

The woman's mouth twitched nervously, but she said, quickly:

"Is that all?"

"No."

"What else?"

"That man is under the muzzle of this revolver, and, if you know aught of my aim, you are aware that I never miss."

"The weapon is mine, and it is unloaded."

Not a muscle quivered in Frank Powell's face at this, while Happy Hugh, believing that Queen Helen knew about the weapon, dropped his hand quickly to his side, when his movement was checked by feeling a cold iron thrust against his temple, and hearing the threatening words, spoken in the softest, sweetest of voices:

"There is no doubt about this revolver being loaded, so take your hand off of that weapon, sir!"

It was Ruth Elgin who spoke, and Happy Hugh saw that he was caught in a double trap.

"Curses!" was hissed forth from the lips of the helpless woman, while Frank Powell, with a light laugh, said:

"I thank you, Miss Elgin, for your aid."

"But this revolver is loaded, as I am not the man to pick a weapon up at random, and Queen Helen only sought to throw me off my guard."

"Yet I see that I have a brave ally in you, and I will ask you to kindly watch that man until I bring Queen Helen to terms."

"Never, sir!"

"Don't be foolish, Miss Weldon,

your life by one movement of my hand, and then to make this man my prisoner, call your guard outside to enter the cabin, and catch him in my trap too, and then, to dress in the suit of one of these men and quietly go among your band and kill every one of them, for there will be but four left to oppose me, and taken at a disadvantage, I can drop them before they can draw a weapon.

"Now you know how I can thwart your revenge; but, as I have given you my word to remain with you and try to cure you, I will do so, unless you drive me to extremes."

"What do you ask?" groaned the woman, feeling that the doctor at bay was more than a match for her.

"I wish you to give that man orders to go and set Horace Hammond free."

"But let him know that if harm befalls my friend, or if he returns here with any of the band to attempt to intimidate me, your life shall be the forfeit."

"I understand."

"Go, Hugh, and set that man free; but say to him that I will yet reap my full harvest of revenge upon him."

Queen Helen spoke in a very weak tone, and Frank Powell motioned to the outlaw to quickly leave the room, which he did, and that his prisoner was gone upon his return to the spot where he had left him, the reader is already aware.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MYSTERY SOLVED.

HAPPY HUGH had hardly reached the head of the canyon, when Horace Hammond heard a step near him.

Who could it be?

Was it the outlaw returning?

He could not see, for his eyes were bandaged.

He could not speak, for a gag had been forced into his mouth.

So he could but wait.

Nearer came the step, and it was evident that the one approaching was making little effort at caution.

Then a voice broke upon the ears of the bound man, and the cheering words gave him hope, for they said:

"Hammond, as I live!"

His voice was rich, and had a ring to it which the prisoner recognized.

But he could utter no word in reply.

Springing forward, after having recognized who it was thus tied to a tree, for there was yet twilight, the new-comer at once began to cut the lariat and remove the blindfold and gag.

For a moment Horace Hammond could not speak, for the gag had been a severe one; but after an instant he grasped the hand of his resuer with the words:

"Dunwoody, I owe you my life."

"Don't speak of it, Hammond," was the response.

"Yes, I must speak of it, and I will prove my appreciation of the service in any way I can."

"But how is it that I find you here?"

"I am on the war-path."

"After who?"

"Queen Helen and her gang."

"Ah! I remember Monk Harris told us of your desperate adventure to entrap that woman."

The young miner laughed lightly and answered:

"It was a close call for her, and for me too."

"I caught her, but had to shake her off of my hook, and then I got nabbed most beautifully."

"Why Powell, Faro Fred, the colonel and a large number of your friends came up into the mountains to rescue you, or to avenge you."

"God bless you all."

"But we could do nothing, as the closest search did not reveal the retreat of the outlaws, and we returned to Golden Gulch, and Powell and myself came out alone and got caught napping," and Horace Hammond went on to tell of the very clever capture by Happy Hugh, with the results that followed, up to the return of the young outlaw to camp to inform Queen Helen who his prisoner was, if she did not already know.

"You may understand that my chances for life would be slim, when he came back, for that woman did not know who I am, or she would never have allowed me to go."

"Well, you are all right now, so let us retreat to a place of safety and see what is best to be done."

"Alas! I can do nothing, for my hands are tied."

"How mean you?"

"I am pledged not to betray, by word or act, any thing I know regarding the retreat of the outlaws."

"And you hold such a pledge binding?"

"Assuredly when Powell was my surety, and his life may depend upon my action."

"True."

"But you know of the retreat?"

"I think I could ferret out the secret, although I was blindfolded when taken there."

"It is too bad that you cannot tell me; but I am hot on their trail, and shall find it out, and

you may rest assured that your young kinswoman and Powell shall be rescued."

"It would be a boast in almost any other one man to say so, Dunwoody; but somehow I have the utmost confidence in you, and your deeds thus far uphold your words, for you have wounded Black Bill, killed two of the band, and also brought that accursed woman to grief."

"I saw that Monk Harris was in trouble, so helped him out, and then I shot one of the band to give them an idea that there was a foe on their track."

"When I killed one of the trio who had you prisoners I fired at long range, yet did not then recognize from my hiding-place either yourself or the doctor."

"I did not fire at Queen Helen, for I am not one to kill a woman no matter how evil she may be; but I shot at one of the band, and my bullet glanced, it seems."

"Now I will leave you to go on alone to Golden Gulch, while I return to await the return of that young man who is to come back for you."

"I think I can give him a surprise-party."

"Don't kill him, Dunwoody, for if he fails to return to camp it will be supposed that I got free in some way and shot him, and the result will be that Powell and poor Ruth will suffer."

"True. I must go slow."

"At any rate, I can promise you that I'll work matters to a crisis soon, and alone, so keep the Vigilantes in Golden Gulch and give me a chance."

"I would like dearly to have your aid, Hammond; but your hands and tongue are tied by your pledge, and the fear, if you act, that harm will befall the doctor and Miss Elgin."

"But I am bound by no pledges, and can act untrammelled."

"Now go on to the Gulch, for your wife must be very anxious about you, and have hope that I will send you good news soon."

"Bless you, Dunwoody! and I leave all in your hands."

"Good-by, and do not be rash."

"Oh! I never am."

"I do not even risk a shot, for I never fire unless sure of my game."

With this the two friends parted, Horace Hammond walking slowly down the canyon on his way to Golden Gulch, and Dick Dunwoody, the Wizard Miner, gliding swiftly through the pines in the direction of the tree to which he knew the outlaw would return for his prisoner.

"I'll be afraid to kill him, for harm would come to Ruth Elgin and that splendid fellow Powell," he muttered, as he took a stand near the tree and in a secure hiding-place.

"But," he added, "I guess I can use him to further my ends."

"At least I will try to do so."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TWO REASONS FOR HOPE.

FOOTSORE and weary, his limbs cramped by being tied so long, his mouth and eyes aching from the effects of the gag and bandage, Horace Hammond toiled slowly on the Overland trail to Golden Gulch.

At last the lights of the mining-camps came in view, and he felt that his journey was nearly ended, so pushed on with renewed vigor.

Arriving at the Gold Brick he tried to get to his room unobserved, but that was impossible, as the town was considerably excited over the events of the past few days, and it seemed that half the population were patronizing Jaques and his liquors.

The subjects of conversation were the halting of the stage-coaches, the kidnapping of Ruth Elgin, the shooting of Black Bill, for Hank Talbot had come in that afternoon and told the story as he had it from the lips of Monk Harris, whose coach he had met on the road, and the absence of Horace Hammond and Doctor Powell upon the outlaws' trail.

As he entered the hotel a hundred eyes fell upon Horace Hammond and as many voices called his name.

All could see that something had gone wrong with him, for he was unarmed; his face was haggard, and he looked like one who had passed through some disagreeable scene.

"Well, old fellow, I am glad to see you back."

"But where is Doc?" asked Faro Fred, springing forward and grasping his friend's hand.

"He is in the mountains," was the evasive reply.

"Not dead?"

"Chips called in?"

"Toes turned up?"

"Planted?"

"Doc hasn't left us ter climb ther golden stairs?"

Such were the queries with which Horace Hammond was flooded from all sides.

"No, the doctor is not dead, nor is he wounded; but I left him in the mountains and I hope he will soon return and give a good account of himself," said Horace Hammond, not caring to tell that the Magic Doctor was a prisoner to the outlaws.

"An' ther leetle gal?" asked one.

"Yes, she whom they tuk out o' ther is ~~ter~~," cried another.

"Miss Elgin is safe, yet a prisoner to Queen Helen."

"Boys, there hev got ter be one thing did, an' that are fer all o' Golden Gulch ter rise up an' run them outlaws out o' the'r den," cried a miner, in stentorian tones, and his words were greeted with a perfect roar of applause.

"My friends, I beg that you will not do one thing rash, for a movement against Queen Helen would cause the death of Miss Elgin and do no good otherwise."

"You have confidence in Doctor Powell, have you not?" said Horace Hammond.

"You bet!"

"Bully fer Doc!"

"The Magic Doc are ther boss."

"He c'u'd yank a dead man back ter life with his yarbs an' pills."

These expressions proving, as many more with them aided to, that the citizens of Golden Gulch had implicit confidence in Frank Powell, Horace Hammond continued:

"Well, my friends, I left all in the hands of Doctor Powell, and before I move again against Queen Helen and her road-agents I must hear from him."

"You knows best, Kid Gloves."

"Yer bet he do."

"You is cap'n," and like remarks proved that Horace Hammond had the crowd upon his side, so he continued:

"You all know the gentleman who arrived in the coach the other day along with the veiled lady, and the man you now know to have been Black Bill?"

"Yes, pard."

"Yer screams o' thet festive cherub what slew ther Philistines up in ther mountains?"

"Yer sings o' thet Wizard Miner, don't yer, pard?"

"I refer to Dick Dunwoody, whose lucky gold finds have gained for him the name of the Wizard Miner."

"Don't we know him, Kid Gloves?"

"Hain't he a pilgrim ter freeze to?"

"Yer bet we knows him fer keeps."

"What about him, pard?"

"You have heard of his daring attempt to capture Queen Helen, and it was believed that he had lost his life."

"But he escaped, and has been upon the outlaws' trail ever since, and with a result that mortally wounded Black Bill, killed two of the band and wounded another, and I expect soon to hear good news from him too."

"So, until we hear from Dunwoody and Powell, let us rest quiet, and make no move against the road-agents."

"If we do not hear from them soon, then will be the time to wipe those devils off the face of the earth."

"We is with yer, Kid Gloves."

"Take yer time, pard."

"Call on us when ther clock do strike ther time ter start."

"We'll be ther, cap'n."

With a word of thanks to the crowd, and a call to Faro Fred and Colonel Roland to follow him, Horace Hammond went on to his room, where, after Ruby had dried her tears of joy at his return, he told the story of his adventures as they had really happened.

"Well, I feel hopeful, now that I know Ruth has Doctor Powell with her," said Ruby.

"Yes, and that, prisoner though he is, he has the power to dictate terms," responded Fanchita Fairbanks.

"And another ray of hope is that that dashing miner, Dunwoody, has heard all from you, Hammond, and is upon the trail of the outlaws," added Colonel Roland, while Faro Fred returned:

"Yes, the Wizard Miner, as the boys call him, is an army of strength by himself, and woe be unto the road-agent that falls in his way, for, though he has no wrongs to avenge, he has gone upon the trail from pure friendship for you, Horace, and, with Doc in camp, and Dunwoody out, the outlaws will be between two hot fires, I will wager high."

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN THE OUTLAW CAMP.

AFTER the departure of Happy Hugh, a silence fell upon those in the cabin.

Queen Helen lay back with her eyes closed and her lips firmly set, while Frank Powell sat by her side his hand upon her pulse.

Ruth had put the pistol away in a secure place, and was seated before the fire once more.

"Have I got beyond your skill, through my excitement?"

The woman asked the question eagerly, and bent her fierce, yet beautiful eyes upon the face of Frank Powell.

"No, I think I can save you; but such scenes must not be repeated, and, prisoner though I am, as your life is in my hands, will allow no one to again enter your cabin while I am in charge."

The woman smiled, and said:

"It would be to your interest to have me die."

"In what respect?"

"You love your friends devotedly, and if I live they shall suffer through me."

"True, but I am not inhuman."

"You have placed yourself in my hands, and I will do all in my power for you."

"Suppose you forfeit your life by doing so?"

"It would not cause me to end your life."

"Yet you threatened it awhile since."

"For another, yes."

"But you must be quiet, and you must feel that though both Miss Elgin and myself are your bitter foes, your present situation appeals to our hearts, and we will care for you as for a friend."

"With good care, quiet, and a determination upon your part to get well, the crisis will pass in a few days, and then the suspense of that poor girl will be at an end."

The woman made no reply, but held forth her hand and gently pressed that of Frank Powell.

Shortly after the doctor saw that she had dropped to sleep, and rising, said in a whisper to Ruth:

"Miss Elgin, you had better retire now, and I will be just outside the cabin, so call me if you need me."

Ruth thanked him, and he stepped toward the door, but halted, to advise her to bolt it after his departure.

"Which way, pard?" asked the guard.

"Where is the officer in command?"

"Lieutenant Carlos?"

"Yes."

"Over in the camp yonder."

"Well, I will go there and seek him, for I wish to have a wicky-up made right here by the cabin where I can sleep, as Queen Helen may need me at any moment."

"She are putty bad then?"

"Yes, and, under no circumstances must you permit any one to disturb her."

"Now I will go over and see your lieutenant, for I will mess with him."

"Yer'd git better grub in ther cabin, ef ther leetle gal does hev ter cook it."

"I prefer to eat at the camp," and Doctor Powell passed on, when the guard called out:

"Don't yer go ter try an' git away, fer it can't be did, an' my rifle kivers yer."

"When I make up my mind to escape I shall go," was the cool reply, as Frank Powell walked over to the camp-fires, sixty yards distant from the cabin.

Carlos and those of the band not on duty sat around a large camp fire cooking their supper, but sprung to their feet at the sudden appearance of a stranger in their midst.

"Do not let me frighten you, men, for I am not dangerous," said Frank Powell with a sneer, and turning to Carlos he said:

"I believe, as the queen is laid up with her wound, that you are in command of the band?"

"I am, sir."

"Well, sir, I pledged myself to Queen Helen to bring her through all right, if she would set my friend, who was captured with me, free."

"She has done so, and I shall fill my part now, and will throw up a shelter just outside of the cabin, where I will sleep, and my meals I will take with you, with your consent."

"Certainly; but are you to have the freedom of the camp?" asked Carlos, somewhat taken aback by the cool, bold air of his prisoner.

"As far as necessary, yes; but if you see me attempting to escape, shoot me."

"That is fair, sure; but how is Queen Helen?"

"Asleep now, and I hope will get through without greater danger."

"But she must have perfect quiet, and I expect you to help me see that she will get it."

"There is no one to wrong her, unless it is the girl."

"On the contrary, Miss Elgin is taking the best of care of her; but there is one whom I wish you to order that he shall not visit the cabin."

"And who is that, sir?" asked Carlos, awed into respect for the man who so fearlessly confronted him.

"You call him Happy Hugh."

"Ah, yes," and the doctor saw that the lieutenant held no love for the young outlaw whom he feared might step into his shoes some day.

Having been provoked particularly by Happy Hugh's having come back to get Horace Hammond into trouble, Frank Powell was determined to keep him away from the cabin, and was glad to see that the lieutenant was no friend of the young man.

If he could get them into a kind of Kilkenny Cat war, Frank Powell would be happy, and so he determined to work for that end.

"He captured you, I believe?"

"Yes, and it has puffed him up with vanity to such an extent I think he expects to step into your shoes, for Queen Helen promised to reward him."

"She did?" and the face of Carlos grew black with rage and jealousy, while he hissed forth:

"She does, does she?"

"So she said," innocently responded Powell.

"I shall see that he keeps away from the cabin, and if he disobeys my orders it shall be the worst for him."

"He would not dare disobey you, knowing that you would punish him, would he?" asked

the doctor, delighted at the turn the affair was taking.

"It shall be his last act of disobedience if he does," was the savage reply, and then, as he saw that the men had supper ready, he invited the prisoner-guest to join them, an invitation which Frank Powell accepted with pleasure, for he was very hungry, having declined the request of Ruth Elgin to allow her to prepare a meal for him, making the best of his situation, and trying to impress upon the outlaws that he did not expect to remain a prisoner any longer than their queen was sick, the Magic Doctor quite won the hearts of the band by his pleasant manners and good stories, which he told well, the listeners making the rocks echo with their laughter.

When he said he would go to work to make him a wicky-up, all hands volunteered to aid him, and soon he had very comfortable quarters built within a few feet of the cabin door.

"Now come back to the fire and have a smoke, sir," urged Carlos.

"Thank you, I will; but will you tell the guard that Happy Hugh is not to be allowed to disturb the queen or see her?"

"I will that," and turning to the guard Carlos said:

"Fuck, if Happy Hugh comes here and wishes to enter the cabin, send him to me."

"I'll do it, Pard Loot'nent."

Carlos smiled as though he had the best of his rival, and walked back to the camp-fire with Frank Powell, who sat down to smoke a pipe, as "a night-cap," the outlaw said.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SHADOWED.

The amazement of Happy Hugh at finding his prisoner gone was great.

At first he did not seem to believe his own senses, and ran about from tree to tree, to see if he had not made some mistake in the locality.

A close search soon proved to him that this was impossible, for he knew the locality too well to be mistaken, and beneath the tree had been a favorite resting place with him.

"No, this is the tree, that is certain," he said to himself for the hundredth time.

"And yet he has gone, and not a sign of how he could have escaped."

"Certainly he could not free himself, for I tie knots too well for that."

"Yet how has he gotten away?"

He passed to and fro with bent head, and at last said:

"Well, as he has gone, I will not speak of his escape, but let them all think that I obeyed the orders of Queen Helen, and turned him loose myself."

"And I will so report it to her; but— Ha! I have it!"

"That man was set free by the very one who has shadowed our steps the past two days, killed Black Bill and two poor fellows, and wounded Lady Helen."

"By the Sierras! but he may be watching me now," and Happy Hugh sprung to cover with an alacrity that was astonishing, and which showed a wholesome regard for the unerring aim of the Wizard Miner.

Cautiously, now that his suspicions were aroused of danger, and that he might then be shadowed, he sought the shelter of every available thicket and tree on his retreat up the canyon.

At last he arrived at the bottom of the cliff, and so bad his fears of that mysterious and deadly shot grown upon him, that he was really nervous, and hastily gave the signal for the guard upon the ledge.

At night, as the guard could not see the one who gave the signal, he was expected to put a test to the signaler by answering.

Happy Hugh having given the three sharp whistles, they reached the ear of the sleeping guard, and he sprung to his feet, and answered by one long, loud whistle.

Instantly Happy Hugh gave the hoot of an owl, and then silence followed for a moment, when he uttered a good imitation of the plaintive cry of the whippowil.

A creaking sound followed, and the trap was lowered, and the young outlaw was drawn to the heights above.

"Waal, Pard Hugh, yer set him free this time," said the guard, inquiringly.

"Yes; he's gone, Nick," was the reply, and Happy Hugh was passing on to camp when the guard called out:

"Ef the queen goes under, Pard Hugh, what are to be did with ther band?"

"How do you mean?"

"Who'll be boss?"

"Carlos is at present our lieutenant, you know."

"Thet are so, but ther queen hev ther right ter name a cap'n, an' it are my opinion she'd name you."

"If she did, I'd serve, Nick."

"One o' ther boys says ther Carlos w'u'd serve even ef Queen Helen did name you in case her chips was called in."

"I would have something to say just there, Nick; but the queen isn't dead yet and it isn't likely that that doctor will let her die."

"But if she does pass in and names me for captain, then Carlos will have to step down and out."

"That's music thet rings, Pard Hugh," cried the guard, as the young man passed toward the camp, leaving the outlaw on duty to roll himself once more in his blankets and seek rest, for he was not supposed to stand watch all night.

Before sleep came to his eyes he muttered:

"It are my opinion thet Queen Helen are harder hit than they says an' is goin' ter cross ther river."

"Ef she go thet way thar is goin' ter be moosic in camp, for I hev seen bad blood growin' in between Happy Hugh and Carlos fer some time, as both of them loves ther queen an' both of 'em wants ter be cap'n."

"As fer me I prefers ther 'oman, fer she hav gathered in ther dust right smart plentiful sin' we bev had her fer cap'n, an she are Satan on a racket when she turns loose."

"Waal, I wants a sartin pile laid by and thn I guesses I kin quit ther road-agent biz— Ha!"

It was undoubtedly a whistle, and the outlaw sprung to his feet.

"I didn't know any o' ther boys was out, so I'll jist try him with ther signals."

The test signals were at once given and promptly answered, and the outlaw guard turned the trap, muttering to himself the while:

"It are some o' ther boys thet hev gone inter ther canyon from the bridge retreat."

A moment after there came from below the words:

"All right, pard."

Instantly the guard drew the trap up by means of the windlass and as it swung over on the cliff a tall form jumped out.

The man was clothed in the black suit of one of Queen Helen's road-agents and wore a mask, yet the guard did not seem to recognize which one of the band it was and asked hesitatingly:

"Is that you Pokey, or Tom?"

"It is Dick Dunwoody, and you are my prisoner," was the cool reply, as the young miner thrust a revolver into the face of the watch.

"Lordy! who in thunder is you?"

"Dick Dunwoody and at your service."

"What does yer want?"

"You."

"Yer hain't none o' ther band."

"No; but I intend to join."

"Is you a pard o' ther queen?"

"I am here on a little private business."

"Waal, 'tain't no use stickin' yer shootin' iron in my face, ef yer is friendly."

"My friendship depends upon how you act."

"Oh, I acts squar' ef yer is one o' ther gung, an' yer must be, fer yer give ther signals al' right; but I doesn't like that shooter starin' me in ther face."

"My man, it will speak to you as well as stare at you, if you do not obey me."

"Up with your hands!"

"Does yer mean it?"

"Obey!"

His hands were raised above his head in a dreary kind of way, and Dick Dunwoody at once disarmed him.

Then he took his lariat and bound him, and said:

"Now, my fine fellow, I'll take a look at your face."

He tore off the mask that covered it, and said:

"Just such a hang-dog face as I expected to find beneath a road-agent's mask."

"Now I wish to see if you love life."

"I does fer a fact."

"Well, I will soon know; but I must tell you just who I am, and what my business is here."

"That's what I wants ter know."

"Well, who was the man that went on to camp ahead of me?"

"Happy Hugh we calls him."

"How far is your camp from here?"

"Don't know."

"You must guess at it."

"Never measured it."

"Well, I'll measure your grave for you if you don't find out within a minute."

"About half a mile," was the sullen reply.

"Thank you."

"You say that you love life?"

"What fool doesn't?"

"Now, my man, as I told you, my name is Dick Dunwoody, and down in Golden Gulch the boys call me the Wizard Miner, as I have a nack of finding gold."

"I started out on the trail of Queen Helen and her vile crew, and so far I have done well, for I shot your spy, Black Bill, killed another of your gang before you found cover, wounded your queen, and called in the chips of one of three others who were carrying two prisoners into camp."

"Perhaps you have heard of these little pleasantries of mine."

in the canyon over there, and I took the liberty of borrowing his clothes, and they are a fair fit, as you see."

"Yas, I sees they is."

"I saw your pard, Happy Hugh, come down the canyon, and I could have killed him then; but I saved him for future reference."

"I shadowed him to this cliff, heard his signals, and, when he had gone, gave them, and you see that I am here and you are my prisoner."

"Cuss yer! I is fer a fact."

"Don't feel hurt about it, my friend, for you would have done worse for me."

"Now, I would like to ask you a few questions, and upon the truthfulness of your answers your life depends, for it is my intention to gag and tie you, then hide you over in the woods and set off for your camp."

"If I find all as you tell me, I shall set you free, giving you your life and some good advice gratis."

"If I find that you have deceived me, then I shall simply drive my knife to your heart upon my return."

"That's flat-footed talk, anyhow."

"Yes, and I mean it."

"What has I got ter tell yer?"

"You are to answer my questions, and I am to find out the truth, and woe be unto you if you deceive me."

"Now, what do you say?"

"Begin work, fer I answers on them tarms every time," was the very ready reply of the outlaw.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TAKING THE CHANCES.

"Now, my man, you know just what you have to expect, so I ask you to govern your answers accordingly."

"Sail in, I says."

"Well, are you the only guard at this post?"

"I is."

"This arrangement here is the means by which the gang reach and leave the canyon?"

"Wo hasn't wings ter fly."

"So you ascend and descend by this machine?" and Dick Dunwoody gazed at the ingenious contrivance.

"We does."

"How far is it to your camp?"

"Half a mile."

"Is there no other way of reaching the camp from this mountain trail than by the means of this machine?"

"Yas."

"Where is it?"

"Bout a mile down ther ledge road."

"Is it the same as this?"

"No."

"What is it?"

"Thar be a bridge lowered by ropes across a ravine, an' it are hid by a pine thicket."

"There is a guard there, too?"

"Thar be."

"How can I find it from the ledge?"

"Thar be a tall pine, struck by lightnin', across ther ravine, an' it holds ther ropes."

"I know the spot, for I saw tracks upon the edge of the ravine."

"Now tell me how you reach your camp?"

"Follow that canyon!"

"Is there a guard on duty there?"

"Not guardin' ther camp."

"What is his duty then?"

"Waichin' ther cabin and ther Magic Doc."

"Ah!"

"Now, when did you come on duty here?"

"At sunset."

"When do you go off?"

"At sunrise."

"How many men are there in your band?"

"There was thirteen altogether, countin' ther queen."

"Yes, and she is the best man of you all."

"Like as not, fer she are a stunner."

"Are all your men in camp?"

"No."

"Where are they?"

"Waal, ther queen an' ten of us held out in camp, an' then we hed two of ther gang playin' spies."

"Ah! where are they stationed?"

"One of 'em you kin account fer, pard."

"Who?"

"Black Bill."

"So I can; but he is not dead?"

"Waal, when I left camp he wasn't so durned fur north o' death, you kin bet."

"Dying?"

"Kinder losin' his health."

"And all the rest of the band are in camp?"

"Nary."

"Where are they?"

"You stands in ther clothes o' one of 'em."

"So I do."

"And the others?"

"Didn't you drop one of 'em in ther canyon, shortly arter yer shoted Black Bill?"

"True; and the others?"

"Is in camp, savin' me an' Tucker, who is at ther bridge."

"Yes, and the other spy?"

"He are in Golden City."

"A pleasant place for him to dwell; but I guess his residence there will be cut short soon."

"Now suppose I tell you that I know you have told me the truth thus far?"

"I knows I has."

"I knew as a certainty nearly all that I have asked you, and would have picked you up, had you lied, so be good enough to tell me the truth in all that I have to ask."

"You is ther devil, I believe, an' I hates ter be alone with yer."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"Now tell me where I will find Miss Elgin?"

"Ther gal prisoner?"

"Yes."

"At ther cabin with ther queen."

"And Frank Powell?"

"Ther Magic Doctor?"

"Yes."

"He are thar too."

"Where?"

"He hes a wicky-up jist nigh ther cabin."

"Is he bound?"

"Nary."

"But under guard?"

"Waal, ther cabin guard hev a eye onto him."

"And the cabin is so situated that the guard can see any one coming in or going out of the rocky pass?"

"Hes yer been thar?"

"No."

"Waal, yer hes it down fine."

"And if I were to go to the retreat what would the guard do?"

"Bore a hole through yer."

"In this rig?"

"Oh! I forgets that yer is playin' road-agent."

"Then I could pass him?"

"Yas," said the man with some hesitation.

But it was observed by Dick Dunwoody, who said, warningly:

"Take care!"

"Waal, ef he halted yer, an' yer didn't sing out ther word, he w'u'd shoot yer."

"What is the word?"

"It are Blonde Bill ter-night."

"Ahl with that answer I would be allowed to pass?"

"Yas."

"Now, tell me, who do you think I resemble most among the members of the band?"

"I tuk yer first fer Pokey, an' then fer Tanglefoot Tom, fer yer is kinder built up like them."

"Which do I look most like?"

"Tom."

"Has he a deep voice?"

"No, it don't suit his size, for it are squeaky."

"Thank you; now give me an imitation of it."

"I hain't equal to do it."

"Try it."

The outlaw obeyed, speaking in a voice that would suit a woman rather than a man.

"He got shotched in the throat, he says, an' it made him talk that way," explained the outlaw.

"Now, my man, you must come with me to a safer place than this, as some one might come here while I am gone."

"This are safe."

"No; I prefer another place to leave you."

"Whar is you goin'?"

"To your camp."

"They'll go fer you thar."

"I'll take the chances."

"Come!"

He led the outlaw away as he spoke, and going into a dense thicket securely bound him, gagged him and tied him to a small tree.

"Now, I'll not keep you long in this bad luck, my man, for I'll return soon."

"But, if I find you have deceived me, and if you know that you have, spend your time prayin', for I'll kill you upon my return."

With this remark Dick Dunwoody walked away in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE OUTLAW RIVALS.

THE little flame which Frank Powell had fanned in the breast of Carlos, the outlaw lieutenant, burned higher and higher, until a serious explosion was threatened.

Returning from his fruitless trip to release Horace Hammond, Happy Hugh wended his way straight to the cabin of the queen.

He did not intend to tell her that he had found the prisoner free, for that would imply that he had not left him securely bound, as certainly there was no one there to release him.

But he did intend to tell her that he had obeyed her orders and set him free, and then to offer his services in taking care of her.

The fact was that Happy Hugh was very deeply in love with Queen Helen.

Her beauty had captivated his heart, and her pluck and daring had wholly won him over, and he had been dreaming that some day he might become her husband.

He intended to do all in his power to win her love by aiding her in the accomplishment of her revenge, and then the two, with the results of their highway robberies, could seek a home elsewhere and live in comfort and peace.

He was filled with these thoughts as he wended his way back toward the camp.

But there was another who held the same opinion.

And that one was Carlos.

He had been well-born, educated, but evil-minded; he had gone on the road to ruin instead of keeping in the path of honor, and at last found himself a common outlaw.

He was possessed of a fine physique, a good-looking face and conversed well, so that he had often made himself companionable to Queen Helen.

Happy Hugh was also a fascinating fellow in his way, and had had the benefit of refined society in his boyhood, but had preferred evil to good, and the former held him for its own.

Queen Helen also found in him a young man whom she could admire, and this fact Carlos had discovered, as well as had Happy Hugh made the discovery that the lieutenant was a rival to be dreaded.

His latest exploit in the capture of Frank Powell and Horace Hammond, had given Happy Hugh the "inside track," as he expressed it, and the words of Queen Helen caused him to feel most hopeful.

Walking directly up to the sentinel on duty at the cabin, he was about to knock on the door when the man said:

"No, Happy Hugh, yer can't go in thar."

"Who says so?" was the angry response.

"Ther Doc."

"The doctor? I will go in!" and the young outlaw again stepped forward, when the guard covered him with his rifle, while he said:

"Dooty is dooty, pard, an' friendship are friendship; but I is actin' on ther former now, so tells yer ter clear out."

"Where is that doctor?" said the young outlaw savagely.

"I am here, sir," and Frank Powell came around the corner of the cabin.

"Do you forbid my going in to see Queen Helen?"

"I do."

"By what right?"

"That of being responsible for her life."

your coming there to-day greatly excited her," remarked Powell.

"By Heave! I will see her, and Carlos, I will give you to understand that I am to be boss here while Queen Helen lies ill."

"Ha! do you mean that?" cried the outlaw officer, stung by the words.

"I do."

"Well, Happy Hugh, I shall contest your right, and there is but one way to settle it."

"And how is that?"

"You are armed, and so am I."

The officer whipped out his revolver as he spoke, and had its muzzle covering the heart of Happy Hugh, who dared not move, well knowing the consequences.

Seeing this, Frank Powell said:

"Pardon me, but would it not be better to have a square meeting, if this fight must go on, and I do not see how it can be avoided?"

The doctor saw if Carlos fired only Happy Hugh would die, while if they fought a fair duel both men would stand a glorious chance of dying, and thus the outlaw ranks would be thinned down considerably.

"What do you propose?" asked Carlos, still keeping his weapon covering his foe.

"I suggest that you go to a spot where the fire will not reach Queen Helen's ears to distract her, and that you take positions ten paces apart, armed with your revolvers, and fire at the word until one or the other falls."

"I am content, though I have the right, as lieutenant in this band, to kill that man in his tracks for mutiny," said Carlos.

"And you, sir?" and Powell turned to Happy Hugh, who answered sullenly:

"I am willing."

Both men knew the deadly aim of the other, and all felt that it must be a duel to the death of one or both of them, and Frank Powell hoped for the latter ending.

Carlos then led the way out of the rocky retreat, and turned down a ravine that was densely wooded on both sides.

A torch from the camp-fire had been brought by one of the men, and, upon the arrival of the party at the spot, two blazing fires were built to give light to the combatants, and preparations were begun for the settlement of the deadly feud between the rivals for the love of Queen Helen.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MIDNIGHT DUEL.

THE position occupied by Frank Powell had caused the outlaws to look upon him as different from any other prisoner that might have fallen into their hands, and he had almost perfect liberty, while, since her arrival in the retreat, Ruth Elgin had been kept constantly under the eye of a guard.

Consequently, upon their arrival at the spot selected for the duel between the rival outlaws, the doctor was consulted by both of them upon the affair.

He marked the spots where the fires should be built to afford the best light for both, and was then stepping off the ten paces, at the request of Carlos, when Happy Hugh suggested that knives should be used instead of revolvers.

The young outlaw knew his great prowess with a bowie-knife, and that his strength was greater than that of the lieutenant.

"That is a barbarous mode of fighting," suggested Frank Powell.

"So I think," remarked Carlos.

But Happy Hugh still urged for knives to be the weapons used, and the doctor said:

"Toss up for the choice."

Of course Happy Hugh could not refuse to do this, else he would have been branded as a coward, and Frank Powell said:

"I'll toss up this gold twenty."

"If it comes heads, you win, Carlos: if tails, then Happy Hugh has the choice."

Both nodded assent, and the doctor spun the gold-piece high in the air.

By a strange freak it fell upon its edge and rolled to the side of a rock, where it remained upright.

Again it was thrown, and falling on the edge, in a crack of a rock, it so remained.

"Waal, that are strange," said one.

"Most cur'us thing I ever seen," replied another.

"How'll she go this time?" asked a third.

Again it was tossed up, and yet no choice, for the gold twenty-dollar piece rolled to the side of a rock as on the first time, remaining upright.

"I guess we had better let the queen decide," said Happy Hugh, growing nervous.

"No, we will decide now," answered Carlos.

"There will be no mistake this time, for I shall mark it."

"If I hit upon the heads, Carlos, it is your choice."

"If upon the reverse, then you have the choice, Hugh."

"Lend me your pistol, please," and Frank Powell turned to one of the men, who promptly handed it to him.

Taking his stand between the two fires, where the light fell upon him, Frank Powell spun the gold-piece into the air.

Then, quick as a flash he fired, and the gold was seen to fall twenty paces distant, rebounding from the side of a rock.

One of the men ran and picked it up, amid a general exclamation at the superb marksmanship of the Magic Doctor, and called out:

"It are hit on ther heads side."

"Yes, you have it, Carlos," coolly said Powell, taking the gold-piece and thrusting it into his pocket, unmindful of the words of praise at his perfect aim.

"My choice is pistols, as you at first suggested, doctor," said Carlos.

Happy Hugh made no reply, and the doctor asked:

"And the distance?"

"Ten paces suit me."

"And me," added Happy Hugh.

The distance was stepped off, and the two men took their stands, their revolvers in their belts.

"At the word *draw*," said Frank Powell, "you are to draw your weapons and begin firing, keeping it up until one or the other falls."

"If my aim don't fail me, the first shot will accomplish that," said Carlos, while Happy Hugh, who had gained his name from his light-heartedness seemed depressed, and remained silent.

"Are you ready?" called out the doctor.

Both men nodded, and then followed the words:

"Draw! and fire!"

Before the second word was uttered by Frank Powell, there came a flash and report, followed instantly by another and both men dropped and lay motionless.

Stepping up to Happy Hugh, who was nearest to him, Frank Powell bent over him for an instant, while the men looked on, and said simply:

"Shot through the heart."

"Dead, pard doctor?" asked one.

"Yes, very dead."

"And t'other?"

The doctor walked over to where Carlos lay and placed his hand upon his pulse.

"He is not dead."

"No—oh! here is the wound upon his head."

"See, the bullet glanced and he is only stunned."

"Bring me some water, please."

A hatfull was brought from a rivulet near by and Frank Powell bathed the wound and examined it closely.

"It was well aimed, but there is no fracture and he will survive it, unless there is concussion, and that I will soon know."

In a few minutes the wounded outlaw revived, and, after an effort arose to his feet, while he glanced quickly toward his adversary.

"Dead?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then I stand where I did before."

"And my wound?"

"Is nothing to a man like you; but I will dress it for you upon our return to camp."

"Thank you."

"Boys, plant Happy Hugh, and then come on to camp, for I will go now with the doctor."

The two men walked away together, and soon entered the rocky pass leading into the rock-bound glen.

"Ha! what is that?"

Carlos pointed to the form of a man lying before the cabin door, and in full glare of the camp-fire which was kept burning near.

"It is the guard," he said.

"And drunk or asleep."

"He shall suffer for this," said Carlos, and the two approached the prostrate man.

"No, he is dead."

"Dead?" gasped Carlos.

"Yes, here is a knife-thrust in his heart," said Frank Powell, who had bent over the guard.

"Good God! then there are foes here."

"So it seems," was the cool reply of Frank Powell.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MIDNIGHT INTRUDER.

WHEN Dick Dunwoody left the cliff guard bound in the thicket, he had made up his mind to play a bold game, in fact a very desperate one.

He knew that his disguise would protect him, in a measure, but, wholly unacquainted with the locality of the retreat, a false move might betray him.

Still he was a man who took desperate chances, and he moved on his way, determined to rescue Frank Powell and Ruth Elgin, if in his power to do so.

He soon came in sight of the pass, with the bright lights glistening through the rocky barrier, and went most cautiously, so that he might reconnoiter every step of the way.

There was no one visible, and he entered the pass, or rather crevice, for it was as though the hill had been split in twain.

The light of the different camp-fires showed him the cabin, with the guard before the door.

Then he saw the fires and shanties of the men in the thicket beyond.

But not a soul, other than the guard was visible.

"Turned in for the night," he muttered.

With his revolvers ready at hand, and his knife loosened in his scabbard, he boldly walked toward the cabin.

The guard saw him, and supposing him to be Tanglefoot Tom, who had gone out with the party to fight the duel, he said:

"Well, Tom, which was kilt?"

This was Greek to Dick Dunwoody, but, pitching his voice in imitation of the man he was supposed to be, he answered, as he still walked toward the guard:

"Durned ef I knows."

Straight up to the guard he went, and then, quick as a flash seized him by the throat, while holding his knife poised over his heart, he said in suppressed tones:

"Surrender, or you die!"

But the guard was not a man to submit without a struggle, and he grasped at the throat and arm of the miner with terrific force.

Dick Dunwoody well knew his peril, for they stood in the glare of the firelight, and he was aware that he had no time to parley.

Instantly he broke the hold of the man upon his arm, and drove the knife with telling force into his breast.

There was a choking groan, a dropping of the arms to the side, and then the full weight of the man was upon his slayer.

Lowering him to the ground, Dunwoody stood gazing at the camp-fires in the thicket, but saw no one moving there.

Then he drew the body to one side, and stepped to the door of the cabin gently rapped.

Horace Hammond had told him that Queen Helen, Ruth Elgin and Frank Powell were the occupants of the cabin, and he expected the latter to come to the door.

He was therefore surprised when he heard the bolt removed from within, and saw a lovely young face gazing into his own.

"Well, what do you wish?" coldly asked Ruth, for she it was.

"I would like to see Doctor Powell."

"He is not in here, but has gone to his own quarters for the night."

"You are Miss Elgin, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Is there any one else in the cabin?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"The woman whom they call Queen Helen."

"Is she sleeping?"

"Yes."

"Miss Elgin, I am not, as I appear, an outlaw, but a friend in disguise."

"To-night I set your brother-in-law free, and I have come to save you if you will trust yourself to my protection," he said in a low earnest tone.

"Who are you?" she asked.

He removed his mask, and she gazed with unfeigned admiration upon his dark, fascinating face, while he said:

"My name is Dunwoody, and I am a miner at Golden Gulch."

"Ah! you are the one of whom Doctor Powell was speaking!" she said quickly.

"If he spoke of Dick Dunwoody, yes; but if I could find Powell, I would do so, though the risk is great, as he is doubtless sleeping in the outlaws' quarters."

"But you I can save if you will come with me at once."

"I would like to trust you for your face bids me do so; but then I hardly know what to do."

"If you will step outside of the door I will show you the body of the man who stood guard here a few moments ago."

"Dead?" she said with a shudder.

"Yes, I was forced to kill him to see you, and, as I had hoped, Powell."

"I do trust you; but would it be right to leave Doctor Powell?"

"Oh yes, for he is a man, and they will do him no harm while he is serving Queen Helen as he is."

"Besides, I pledge myself to return and aid in his rescue, if you will go now with me."

"I will go."

"Lose no time, for it is most perilous to delay."

She stepped back into the cabin, glanced at the sleeping woman, and throwing her wrap about her, came softly to the door, closing it after her.

As she stepped outside Dick Dunwoody joined her, and, grasping her arm, hurried her away toward the pass, but not until her eyes had fallen upon the dead body of the guard.

Once out of the pass, and they hurried along the trail to the cliff, and leaving the maiden there, Dick Dunwoody sought his prisoner in the

But Dunwoody allowed him no time for conjecture as to what it all meant, for he said, abruptly:

"Well, I am back again."

"So I sees."

"And I have rescued this lady from Queen Helen, though I had to kill the guard at the cabin to do so."

"Did yer kill him?"

"Yes, so that you are in luck."

"I is so far, pard, but I ain't braggin' on my luck just now."

"Well, you can if you do as I tell you."

"Sail in."

"Can you tell a straight lie?"

"I has done it in my time."

"Well, I am willing to spare your life if you serve me secretly, while pretending to serve Queen Helen."

"And more, I will give you a handsome sum in gold to start you with."

"What are I ter do?"

"You are to take your place here again, just as before, and not to allow any one to know that I have been here."

"That are good."

"It will be better for you if you do as I say."

"I believes yer."

"Let them find you here at your post and say nothing of what has happened."

"Then arrange it so that you can be on duty here each night."

"I guesses I kin."

"It will prevent mistakes if you are, as, were you in camp and it was attacked, you might be killed or captured, and if the latter, you would hang."

"I is sartin o' that."

"Now, do as I tell you, and you may expect to see me to-morrow night, and I will give you the same signal to lower the trap for me."

"If I do not come to-morrow night look for me the following evening, for I will be here."

"Queen Helen is seriously wounded, your band is being thinned out, and all are doomed excepting yourself."

"If you lay a trap for me there will be those to avenge me, so I ask what you intend to do?"

"Just as you says, pard."

"And save your neck?"

"Yes."

"You are not betraying your comrades, for I know all that I care to know."

"Durn them, fer I is lookin' out fer my neck."

"You are right."

"I w'u'd hate ter see ther queen hurted."

"She will not meet with any harm, though she will be forced to leave here and go where she cannot injure others."

"I is glad o' that, for she am a good woman in her way."

"Well, now see that you do not betray me."

"Lower away the machine," and Dick Dunwoody stepped into the trap with Ruth, and the outlaw taking his place at the windlass, raised and then lowered the car into the canyon below.

Once there, the Wizard Miner led his fair companion to a pine thicket, and, leaving her, soon returned dressed in his own clothing, while he said:

"I'll leave that somber suit for masquerading in to-morrow night."

"Now, what kind of a pedestrian are you, Miss Elgin?"

"I am a good one, for I love to walk."

"Then we can set out at a brisk pace, for we have a long walk ahead of us."

He offered his arm as they turned into the broad trail, but she declined it, and kept up the pace well with him.

Resting now and then, they pressed on, and at last, just as the eastern skies grew gray, they reached Golden Gulch.

Very few were stirring, and the Gold Brick was deserted by the patrons of Jaques's bar; but Plug Chew, who acted as night clerk after the major retired, gave a shout of welcome as he recognized the miner, that awakened nearly every one in the house.

"Hoorah! bravoe! gladee see Wizee Minee comee backee."

"Gotted 'Melican galee too."

These words told the story, and Ruth had hardly entered the sitting-room before in came Horace Hammond and Ruby, for they were already up and dressed, as they intended to take a gallop up to the Elgin mine before breakfast.

The warm welcome which Ruth received made her heart glad, and she was led away to her room by Ruby, to whom she related her story, while Dick Dunwoody told Horace Hammond just what had occurred, but asked him to keep it quiet, as he would start back to see what could be done for Frank Powell.

"After what you have done I have no doubt of your success, Dunwoody, and only regret that my hands are so tied that I can not accompany you," said Horace Hammond.

"Oh! I know the ropes and will get through all right, and really I enjoy the danger," was the light-hearted answer.

"I believe you."

"But now you must have breakfast and then get some rest."

"No, I'll go up to my room to freshen up a little, and then go back with Monk Harris, who I believe goes out this morning?"

"Yes, he starts at nine; but will you go so soon?"

"Certainly, for delays are dangerous."

"Then come down as soon as you freshen up your toilet, and I will call up Fred and his wife, so that we will all have breakfast together."

"By the way, is that man whom Powell took into his service, here?"

"The one who nursed Black Bill?"

"Yes."

"Jockey Tim he is called."

"Yes, he is at the stables."

"Will you kindly fetch him to my room under some excuse?"

"Certainly."

Dick Dunwoody then went on to his room and commenced making himself more presentable to appear at breakfast with the ladies.

He had not quite completed his toilet when Horace Hammond entered, and said:

"Well, the ladies, Faro Fred and Colonel Roland will all be at the table to welcome you when you are ready."

"Thank you."

"And Jockey Tim?"

"He will soon be here; but may I ask what you wish with him, for I do not like the fellow I confess?"

"Oh! I wish to ask him about an acquaintance of mine whom he knows," was the indifferent reply, spoken in a louder tone than he had before used.

And as he spoke, Dick Dunwoody stepped quickly and lightly to the door, and opening it suddenly, into the room tumbled Jockey Tim, to the great surprise of himself and Horace Hammond.

CHAPTER XLII.

A SPY IN TROUBLE.

"Oh! excuse me, gentlemen; but I stumbled and fell against your door, just as I went to pick up this letter," and Jockey Tim held forth a letter which Major Simon Suggs had asked him to bring up to Horace Hammond.

"Oh! you did, did you?"

"How strange that you should have fallen with your ear against the keyhole, and kept it there until I opened the door," answered Dick Dunwoody.

"Does you accuse me of listenin'?" angrily asked the man.

"Certainly, for I know that when Mr. Hammond asked you to come with him to my room, you sneaked up afterward, so that you could listen, intending if you heard anything against you, to skip."

"But you are my game just now, and if you attempt any tricks with me, I will wing you."

The man turned deadly pale, but said:

"You knows you has me dead, fer what kin I do with such a man as you, and Kid Gloves sittin' here too?"

"Nothing, I frankly admit, nor do I intend to give you the chance to stab me in the back."

"See here, my man, what do you know about Queen Helen?"

"Nothing."

"Therein you lie, for I say you are a member of her band."

"You is joking."

"I never joke with a man who has a rope around his neck," was the painfully significant reply.

Jockey Tim became livid at this and said in husky tones:

"What does yer mean?"

"What did you know about Black Bill?"

"He was a stranger to me."

"Oh, no, for you were pards."

"I says we wasn't."

"I'll prove it."

"You can't."

"Well, I'll try."

"You came here first as Queen Helen's spy, and then Black Bill came and joined you."

"He being wounded you did the work."

"What work?"

"You signaled when the coaches left with gold, and just who was in them."

"How c'u'd I?"

"I'll show you."

"Come, Hammond."

Grasping the arm of Jockey Tim, Dick Dunwoody left the room, followed by Horace Hammond, who was greatly surprised at the turn affairs were taking.

Leading the way to the wing where had been the room of Black Bill, they came to a door which led into a lumber garret.

It was locked, but Dunwoody said:

"Give me the key."

"I hain't got no key."

"Open the door or by Heaven I'll turn you over to the Vigilantes."

The man shuddered, but obeyed by taking a skeleton key from his pocket and unlocking the door.

Up into the garret they went, and straight toward a large window.

"Hammond, this window commands a view

of the mountains, as you see, and yonder you can see the cliff above Queen Helen's Toll-gate, as the miners call the canyon.

"From the cliff a man can look into this window, and, with a good glass, can read any signals shown."

"This man has his signals hidden somewhere here, and if he does not produce them I will give him up to the Vigilantes."

"If I does?"

"Oh! you are anxious to make terms, are you?"

"Yas."

"Well, I take the stage this morning out of Golden Gulch, and you can go with me."

"Whar?"

"It matters not."

"Does you intend to hang me?"

"Not if you act squarely with me."

"I'll act on ther squar."

"Then bring out those signals."

This order was obeyed, Jockey Tim producing from a secure hiding-place a number of pieces of white cloth with large black letters upon them.

"You see, Hammond, this tells the story, as these letters can be read from the mountains."

"It does, indeed," said Horace Hammond, amazed by what he saw.

"Now, Jockey Tim, get your traps together, and come to my room."

"Wait there for me until the stage is ready to go, and then we will leave together and only Mr. Hammond here will know what a rascal you are."

"Attempt to hide or dodge me, and I turn the Vigilantes upon your trail."

"I will go with you, pard, and glad to," said the now thoroughly alarmed man.

"See that you keep your word."

"Here is my key, so get your traps and go there."

The three descended to the hall, and Horace Hammond and Dick Dunwoody went on to the breakfast-room, where they found their friends already awaiting them, and Ruth Elgin looking exquisitely lovely after the perils she had passed through, and the hardships of the past night.

Dick Dunwoody was given a hearty welcome by all, and the breakfast passed off pleasantly, after which the Wizard Miner bade his friends farewell and departed in the stage, to the surprise of every one but Horace Hammond.

He mounted to the box with Monk Harris, while Jockey Tim went as an inside passenger, having the coach all to himself, and yet he seemed not happy.

CHAPTER XLIII.

CONCLUSION.

MONK HARRIS was told the story of Dick Dunwoody, as the coach rolled on toward the mountains, of all that had occurred, for the young miner knew that he could fully trust the driver.

"Waal, you beats ther deck, an' carries four aces all ther time," said the astonished and delighted Monk.

"Does yer say yer intends ter hev me drop yer off now?"

"Yes."

"Goin' ter kill ther gerloot?"

"Not if he does as I tell him."

"Oh! you intends ter use him?"

"Yes."

"There is another secret way to the retreat of the outlaws which that villain knows, and I intend he shall take me that route."

"I could go the other, but I am not so sure but that the guard I left there may play me false, and it is best to be on the safe side."

"You bet, and I says you'll come through all right."

"I intend to try to do so."

"You'll do it."

"Now, whar does yer wish ter light?"

"Right there at the curve."

Monk Harris drew rein at the designated spot

"Who said I hed one?"

"I do."

"Yer knows a heap."

"Yes, I am posted on you and your cut-throat gang. Now hold out your hands!"

The man knew that resistance was vain, and he submitted in silence to being bound.

Leading him to a place of safety off of the trail, Dick Dunwoody forced a gag into his mouth and left him, to hasten toward the canyon to secure his black suit.

This he succeeded in doing, and then returning to Jockey Tim, he made him follow his example and draw on the black clothes and mask.

"Now we will strike for the bridge," he said, and Jockey Tim led the way, as he knew he could not do otherwise, for Dick Dunwoody, he was well aware, was no man to trifl with.

"Ah! the bridge is down," said the miner, as they came to a ravine and saw a slender, yet substantial bridge spanning it some forty feet in width, and of great depth.

Upon the opposite side was the tall pine to which the outlaw had referred the night before, and ropes extended to it from the bridge, showing that the structure, by means of a windlass, could be rolled out across the ravine and drawn back into the thicket of pines out of sight.

"Ther band are out upon the road," said Jockey Tim.

"Ah! doubtless to halt Monk Harris?"

"Yes, that is what they are doing."

"Then I shall give them a surprise."

"Give the signal, to see if any one is at the bridge."

"Guess not, or he'd hev drawed it back."

"They was short-handed, I guess, an' tuk him along."

"Give the signal anyhow."

The man obeyed, uttering the cry of a hawk, but no answer came, and they went forward and crossed the bridge.

"Now, Tim, I intend to tie you to that tree, so that you won't be troublesome," and Dick Dunwoody soon made his prisoner fast to a pine in the thicket.

Then Dick Dunwoody took his stand behind a boulder and waited, his pistols in either hand.

He had not long to wait before there was heard the sound of hoofs and four horsemen came in sight.

They were road-agents, dressed in their somber garb and wearing masks.

As they advanced to the ravine they dropped into single file and slowly rode upon the bridge.

They were all four upon it, the leader within a few yards of being across, the rear man as many yards from the other end, when loud and clear rung out the command:

"Halt and surrender!"

They drew rein, and their pistols at the same time, when, disdaining to fire from an ambush, Dick Dunwoody, no longer in his garb of a road-agent sprung into full view and drew trigger.

At the crack of his revolver the leader dropped from his saddle, and his horse sprung forward without him; but the movement of the animal shook the frail bridge until it creaked, and swayed, as though about to go down, and, in their terror the three remaining road-agents called out lustily for mercy.

"Throw your weapons into the ravine then!" demanded Dunwoody.

This was quickly done.

"Now, one of you at a time ride forward."

The leading man obeyed, and in an instant he was seized and bound with his own lariat.

The next followed to share a like fate, and the third was also rescued, when, to their amazement the three men saw that they had but one man to deal with, instead of a number as they had supposed.

Releasing Jockey Tim from his tree, Dick Dunwoody then marched his prisoners toward their camp.

"Where is your leader?" he asked.

"Ther queen?"

"No, the one who acts in her place now?"

"Carlos, the lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"Your first shot sent him down ther ravine."

"How many did you leave in camp?"

"One man."

"And is that all you have?"

"There is one feller at the cliff retreat waitin' ter be tuk in," said the outlaw addressed, seeing now that he might as well make a clean breast of it.

Marching them on to the pass, a form suddenly stepped out into the trail before them.

"Powell?"

"Dunwoody!"

"Well, you have anticipated me, Dunwoody, for after these fellows left for their raid this morning, Queen Helen was seized with a spasm, and in her struggling she ruptured a blood-essel and died."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"Ther queen dead?" asked the outlaws.

"Yes, and it is better so than to have died in prison, for, had she recovered, she would have been sent there."

"When she died, I determined to act for my

self, and tried to capture my guard; but he resisted and I killed him, and I was just waiting for these fellows to return to have it out with them, when lo! you appear with them, Dunwoody."

"Yes, I bagged them all, fortunately."

"But there is one more at the cliff retreat I want, so, Powell, I will leave these fellows with you while I look him up."

So saying Dick Dunwoody hastened on to the cliff, and found there the outlaw whom he had met the night before.

"Waal, yer comes t'other way," said the outlaw, in surprise.

"Yes, and I have to tell you that your queen is dead and her band prisoners, excepting yourself."

"As for you, I see that you are faithful, so here is the money I promised you, and I advise you to go to the corral, mount a horse, and get many miles between you and this place before night."

"I'll do it, and thankee."

"Go now, and lose no time."

"Pard, I thanks yer."

So saying the outlaw grasped the money handed to him by the Wizard Miner and struck off in the direction of the valley in the mountains, where the horses of the band were kept, while Dick Dunwoody retraced his steps toward the camp.

He found Frank Powell had set the prisoners to work digging a grave for the wicked woman, and when it was completed she was placed in it in silence, no tear being shed, no sorrow felt, no prayer said over the last resting-place of Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.

Then the prisoners were mounted upon horses and bound to them, and with other animals loaded with booty, and mounting themselves, Dick Dunwoody and Frank Powell set out for Golden Gulch.

It was late in the afternoon when they arrived; but all the town soon gathered about the Gold Brick Hotel, and when the sun set that evening the four outlaws had paid the penalty of their crimes, for the Vigilantes had quickly hanged them.

With the end of Queen Helen and her band, Golden Gulch began to breathe more freely, and Monk Harris and Hank Talbot drove the Overland stage mails without fear of being called upon to "Throw up your hands!"

As for Dick Dunwoody, the Wizard Miner, he became the idol of the Gulchites, and his mines panning out rich, he soon after followed the example of Horace Hammond and Faro Fred, and got married, his wife being none other than Ruth Elgin, who had fallen in love with him at first sight.

Since those days Golden Gulch has been deserted, as its mines have been worked out; but there are those who have figured in my story who can never forget the days they passed there, and often speak of the revengeful Queen Helen of the Overland.

THE END.

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